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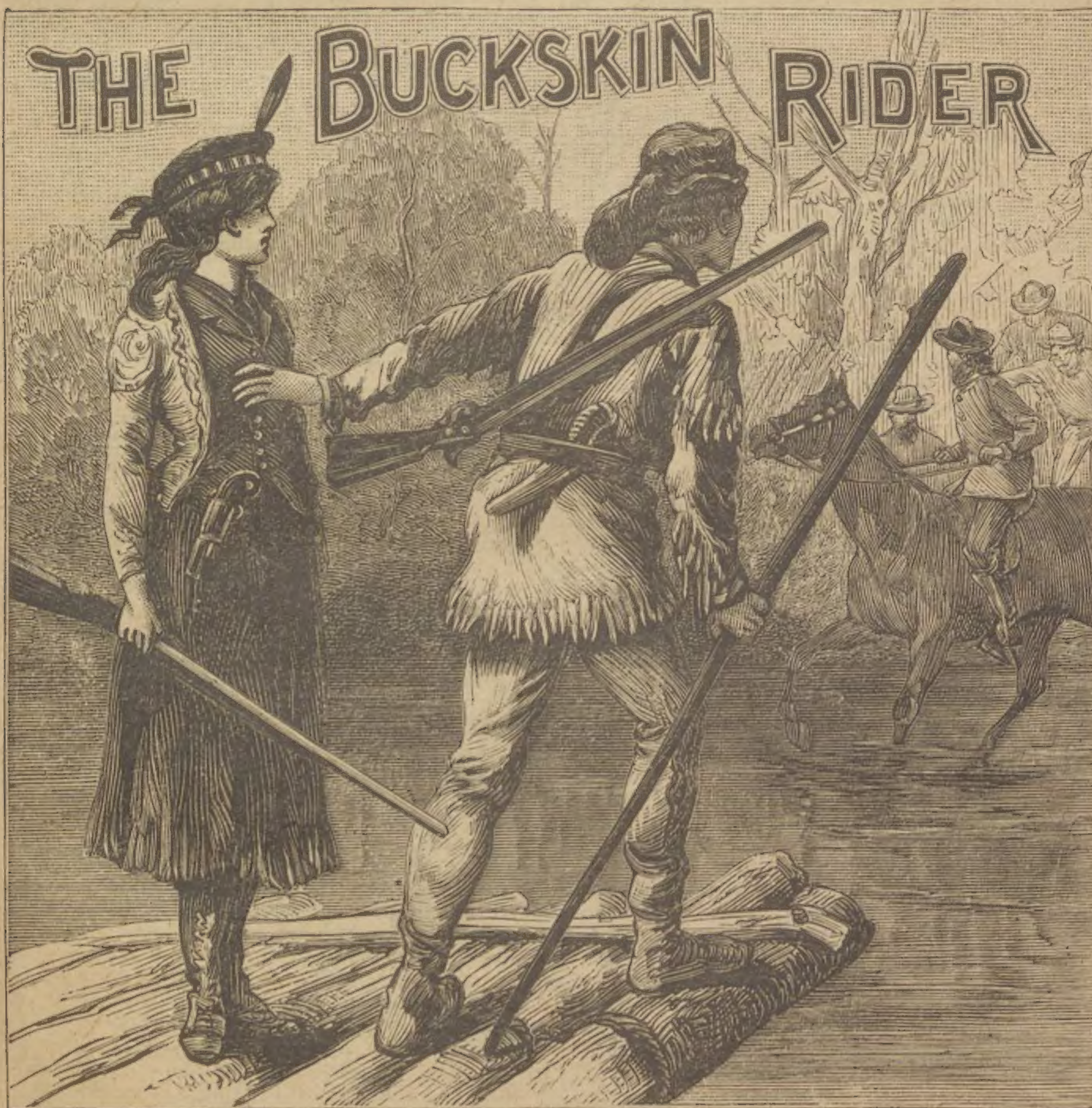
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THE RAFT FLOATED DOWN THE CURRENT WITH CONSIDERABLE SPEED, AND BILL LOOKED BACK TO
CATCH A GLIMPSE OF HIS COMPANIONS.

By Guy Greenwood.

The Buckskin Rider;

OR,

THE WHITE SCOURGE.

BY GUY GREENWOOD.

CHAPTER I.

THE BUCKSKIN GUIDE.

A BREAK in the thick growth of underbrush along the banks of a Western river, revealed a canoe floating silently upon its bosom, and a single man sitting upright, with his eyes flashing over the broad expanse of level country, which lay before him. In the distance were the bare ridges of the mountains, blue against the sky, and on the other side the limitless prairie, stretching outward as far as the eye could reach. The man in the canoe was not looking at the scenery, but at three riders seen upon the prairie, perhaps a mile distant, who were stationary at the foot of a low hill, looking across the country in the other direction. They were Indians, mounted upon the fleet steed of the plains, the mustang; but though too distant to make out their features, the man in the canoe was too good a judge of Indian habits and costumes not to know that they were part of a band of those pirates of the prairie, the Blackfeet.

The man who sat in the canoe was of middle size, with a muscular frame, and a face bronzed by exposure to the sun and wind. Though a rough, rude forester, he had a frank, manly look about him, calculated to win friends. His rifle, the never-failing companion of border-men, lay in the bow of the canoe, ready for use, and evidently was a weapon which had seen service on many a field. The man wore a soiled buckskin hunting-shirt, and fringed leggings, with a beaver-skin cap, rudely made, and moccasins. Besides the rifle he carried a heavy hunting-knife and a pair of pistols. The Indians remained in the same positions at the foot of the hill, looking, at that distance, like statues carved in bronze. Clinging to a branch of a bush to keep himself from floating down the stream, the buckskin man sat quietly in the canoe, with his eyes upon those inveterate foes of the trapper, the Blackfeet.

"Cuss 'em," said the buckskin man, parenthetically, "the'r arter skulps!"

"Arter skulps" the Blackfeet certainly were, and the white man knew what party they were watching, and with the chivalrous feeling which is an innate principle in these rude border-men, he determined to do what he could to assist the menaced party of whites. He knew by the manner of the Blackfeet that they were simply on a scout and that others of their band were lurking in the vicinity for the coming of evening, before they made a dash. The watcher on the river remained quiet for a while, until the Indians turned their horses' heads, and began to ride slowly back toward the water-course.

"Back out!" said he, letting go his hold upon

the bushes. "Them's the idee. I wonder what'n thunder brings em back?"

As the light canoe dropped downward under the pressure of the current, he saw what it was that drew the party back. A man was riding away from the river-bank at a lazy gallop. He evidently saw nothing of the red-skins, who were approaching him hidden by a roll in the prairie, their unshod horses making no noise upon the soft grass of the plain.

"This won't do for me," muttered the buckskin scout. "I ain't goin' to let a feller human get his ha'r raised without doin' a thing. Let see what my tulip says to it."

He pushed the canoe ashore, and ran up the bank hastily, rifle in hand, just as the long spears of the Blackfeet showed above the roll of the prairie, and they set forward at a hard gallop. The horseman now saw them for the first time, and throwing his hand behind him, drew his revolver, which he held ready in his hand, and looked at the coming Indians. Something in the attitude of the man warned the Indians that at least they had no coward to deal with, but a man of cool, resolute temper, not likely to flinch at the near prospect of danger. He checked his horse and stood facing them, quietly awaiting their approach. This attitude in one whom they had expected to ride down without trouble, was more than the Blackfeet had counted on, and they halted irresolutely and jabbered to one another.

"Fouled a snag, by gravy!" the scout ejaculated. "He's a cool 'un, that chap, and a man arter my own heart. I'll wait; he ain't a prairie man or he wouldn't ride in that way when he knowed Injun signs. They'll sarcumvent him ef he don't take keer."

The Indians were grouped together on the plain, perhaps a hundred yards from the solitary horseman. All at once they appeared to come to a conclusion, for they separated with wild yells, and came at their game from three different directions, with their long spears ready. The man did not move, nor even raise his hand from his side until they came within easy range of the pistol, when the watchful scout saw him gather up his bridle-rein with his left hand, and with a skillful wheel which none but a good horseman could accomplish, bring two of the savages within range.

Crack, crack. Two riderless horses were seen bounding over the plain, while the third Indian, in desperation, wheeled and ran. Twice the horseman raised his pistol, but the Indian was out of sight behind the body of the horse, showing nothing except one foot and hand. The course of the Indian took him directly toward the river, and the spot where the buckskin scout stood half hidden by the bushes. In his anxiety to escape, the Indian did not see the new enemy until he sprung up suddenly, and laying one hand upon the bridle of the flying mustang, dealt the Indian a terrific blow upon the head with the other hand. The rascal's foot slipped from the stirrup, his hand released its hold, and he dropped senseless to the plain, the blood welling from a cut in his temple dealt by the iron hand of the scout. Without paying any attention to him, his assailant bounded into the saddle, and shouted to the other horseman:

"Come on yer", blame you! Thar's a grist of Blackfeet whar these 'uns come from, and we've got ter ride hard."

The man he had met showed by his prompt action that he was quick to understand danger when it came. Without asking a single question he joined the buckskin guide, and turning their horses' heads, they rode down the river at a breakneck pace, hardly looking behind them. They had not ridden half a mile when they became conscious that they were closely pursued, and looking back, they saw a clump of Blackfoot spears just rising above the last roll of the prairie, a quarter of a mile away. These soon rose above the ridge, and revealed a band of more than thirty, in their picturesque attire, riding those fleet-footed and tireless animals, which are to be found only upon the prairie. Upon the right hand, riding hard, they saw another and smaller band laboring to get ahead of their foes, and force them toward the river. The buckskin guide looked at his companion with a grim smile, and set his teeth hard.

"That means fight," said the stranger, quietly. "Let us make for the foot-hills. Once there we can bid these knaves defiance."

"What mou't yer name be, stranger?" said the scout, never ceasing his headlong course.

"I am called Clinton Aubrey, and I command an expedition now on its way to the Oregon River. What do you call yourself?"

"Them that knows me well call me Buckskin Bill," replied the other. "I'm a free trapper and guide, I be. Them red niggers want to cut us off from the prairie, an' drive us into the River, blame the'r hides. What d'ye think? Would we dar' to go through that little party on the right?"

"Have you got a revolver?" said Clinton Aubrey.

"No, I ain't; wish I had, but I ain't likely to git one, wuss luck."

"Try this one," said Aubrey, taking another from his right-hand holster. "Now do you think we can go through them?"

"You bet," was the short reply. "Ride easy, now. Edge a little away from the river. Them niggers ain't got no rifles, they ain't, an' they don't know that we've got repeaters, nuther. Now listen to me. Don't you *kill* the fu'st one you shoot at. Break his leg or his collar-bone. One wounded man is wuss than a dozen dead ones. 'Cause he yells and pulls up the grass. But whatever ye do, keep them spears off yer body, 'cause ef they git into you they'll make you feel uncomfortable; now mind, I tell you!"

The two had eased up their pace somewhat, though still riding at a sufficient speed to keep them ahead of the Indians in the rear. Those on the flank, seeing the distance lessening, began to close in more and more, and when within half a mile of the hills which the flying men proposed to make a haven of safety, scarcely a hundred yards separated them. They were now near enough to mark the grotesque costumes of the savages, and saw that they were all stalwart and ferocious-looking warriors, evidently the pick of the Blackfoot tribe.

Let me take that chap with the horns on the back of his head, and you pick the man in the sombrero, with the eagle-feathers sticking up.

Knock 'em over an' then ride slap through 'em, giving it to 'em right and left."

When scarcely twenty yards separated them the yells of the Indians became deafening, and they pushed their wild steeds to the utmost, whirling their spears in the air, and beating upon their shields of buffalo-hide. Buckskin Bill gave the word, and the two whirled their horses suddenly and threw themselves upon the flank of the astonished warriors. The hero of the sombrero went down, yelling like a demon, while he of the horns added a tuneful chorus to the concerted pieces sounded by his friends, for Clinton Aubrey was a good marksman, and shattered his shoulder by a well-directed-shot. Then they burst into the midst of the savage band and sent a shower of bullets right and left, scattering their adversaries like chaff. The Blackfeet had heard stories of the death-dealing weapon which they now met for the first time. So paralyzed were they by the leaden shower, that they made no attempt at resistance, but each used his best means of getting out of this dangerous vicinity, and the two thundered on toward the hills, leaving the discomfited band to foot up the profit and loss of the assault and find a heavy balance on the side of the revolvers.

But, though they had broken through the ranks of the enemy, they were not yet safe, for another and larger party were following close in the rear, rendered doubly ferocious by the loss they had so recently suffered at the hands of the white men.

Though closely followed, the two men gained the pass, and darting up, found themselves among the foot-hills which they sought as a refuge. Knowing nothing of the country, Clinton Aubrey gave himself up to the guidance of Buckskin Bill, and followed him up the pass without a word. At last they rode through a part of the canyon a hundred feet above the level plain, so narrow that they could only ride singly. Once through the opening, they halted and loaded their revolvers.

"They won't come at us hyar easy," said Buckskin Bill, "'cause ye see only one of the critters kin come at a time, an' like ez not we'd make it lively fur him afore he got back. No, siree! Ef they've got a chief with 'em who understands white ways, you'll see him up yer' with a flag. They know these hills, an' how easy two men c'u'd keep this pass ag'in' a hundred."

"Can't they come down upon us from above, and fire down the rocks?" said Aubrey.

"Kain't git thar," said Buckskin Bill, with a chuckle. "Thar's the river on one side, and on the other thar's a canyon a hundred feet wide. You hold stiddy while I go out an' take a look at 'em."

"Don't show yourself, my friend. You have already endangered yourself on my account."

"You shet up! Ain't one white human got to stand by another white human—say? Now don't you git me mad talkin'. You stay yer' while I go and scout."

He stole away on foot, and was gone about ten minutes. When he came back he was laughing heartily. When he had showed himself at the mouth of the pass, revolver in hand, the

Indians, who were approaching it, halted with one accord, not caring to come too near the weapon he held. The chief was now coming to have a parley.

"I reckon we'd better ride down whar we kin see the red heathen," said Bill. "They might git up some deviltry ef we don't watch 'em clust."

They mounted again, and rode down the pass until they met the chief, who rode toward them with a piece of white buckskin fluttering from the head of his lance. He was a stalwart handsomely-framed man, of a saturnine expression, painted in fantastic colors. He wore the fringed leggins common among the trappers, and rode with a high Mexican saddle, and the long spurs these cruel horsemen use. A shirt of fringed calico reached to the knee, and over it was thrown a heavy blanket, which a life in this region makes so necessary. His head was covered by a Fez cap, obtained no one knows how, in which a single eagle-plume was thrust with jaunty grace.

This was the brave who rode up to the two white men, and with an effrontery only to be found in an Indian, extended his hand with the cordial greeting, in broken English: "How do?"

CHAPTER II.

THE WHITE DEMON'S VICTIM.

BUCKSKIN BILL, though tempted to shoot the villain through the head, received the extended hand. He knew that the man before him was one of the most pitiless of these border pirates, and had rolled up a fearful account of blood and crime. It was no other than the notorious Blackbird, a man whose whole life had been steeped in crimes of the blackest die; yet he approached the white men with the cool hardihood of a more "civilized" rogue.

"Now look yer', Blackbird, what ar' yer tryin' to do?" said Bill.

"The Blackfeet are very sad," said Blackbird, pathetically. "Their tears drop like rain, when they think how great a mistake their white brothers have made. See how great an evil a rash man can do! My white brother yonder was alone on the prairie. Three of my braves saw him, and ran to ask him if they could do him any good. When he took the little gun which shoots many times, and wounded them sore. It was a cruel thing to do, when they loved him so much."

"That's too *thin*, you know," said Bill. "Do friends usually come at a man with their spears leveled, yelling like painted devils?"

"They are playful," said Blackbird. "They said to themselves, it will make our white brother smile, when he sees the young braves shake their spears. But he, too cruel, shot them with the little gun. The hearts of the Blackfeet are very sore."

"Some of their heads ar' sore too," said Bill, upon whom the pathetic voice of Blackbird had very little effect. "Don't skul' now; be a man. I would, if I was you. What do you want?"

"My brothers must give up the little guns which shoot many times. The Blackfeet wish to see them."

"Would you like to look at one?" said Clin-

ton, coming forward with the pistol in his hand. The Indian nodded, and watched furtively while he filled the single empty chamber, took out the old cap and recapped the weapon. The eyes of Blackbird glistened. To become possessed of such a weapon as that, he would have risked almost anything.

"Would my brothers show us how to use it?" said he.

"He did show you awhile back," said Buckskin Bill. "'Tenyrate I thort he did. What ar' them chaps edgin' up this way fur, Blackbird? You order 'em back, or I'll turn this weepoon on you, an' fill you so full of balls that you won't git over it quick."

"They are inquisitive. They seek knowledge," said Blackbird. "Let them, too, see how to use the little gun."

"Order 'em back," said Bill, putting the revolver close to Blackbird's prominent nose. "Do it quick, or I'll make cat's meat of you so quick you won't know what hurt you."

Blackbird reluctantly waved his hand, and the ardent seekers after knowledge retired, considerably crestfallen at the failure of their little scheme, which was to steal upon the white men while in conference with Blackbird, and ride them down before they could use their revolvers.

"You came for our revolvers, did you?" said Bill. "Why; do you think we are nat'ral fools, or what? When we've got weepoons fit to fight the hull Blackfoot tribe, did you think we'd give 'em up to thirty or forty? I give you credit for more sense."

"Will you not give the little gun to Blackbird? He will be your friend forever."

"Kain't think of it. You mou't ez well give it up. By the way, you was a-lookin' into a camp over thar. Do you happen to know that every man has got one of these yer' little guns? What chance would you and your painted thieves have ag'in' men like that? Now I warn you to keep away from them, 'cause ef you don't, blame me ef I don't call 'em together and ride down into yer villages and wipe the Blackfoot nation from the face of the univer al airth."

Blackbird shrugged his shoulders. Being somewhat accustomed to the braggadocio of the trappers, he was not particularly awed by the threats. After importuning them for some time, and threatening all manner of evil, he rode away and joined his band. But, in spite of his threats, he knew better than to attempt their capture in their present situation, and could not have induced his companions to join him in the assault, if he had been so inclined, and there was nothing for it but to leave them where they were.

Bill was not surprised when, after a hurried consultation, the Indians gave a farewell whoop and rode back over the ground they had so lately passed, to pick up their wounded and bury their dead comrade.

"What kind of men are these you've got with you, boss?" said Buckskin Bill. "Are they bordermen, or are they greenhorns?"

"Not greenhorns, I hope."

"Mou't be as full of book-l'arnin' as a dog is full of fleas, and be greenhorns jist the same."

said the guide. "It stands to reason, you know, that a man kain't know all about the passes of these yer' hills, unless he's camped and fou't and trapped among 'em years and years."

"Well, I suppose you would class some of my men as greenhorns, then," said Aubrey. "There is not one of them who is not a good soldier, who cannot hit a mark with a rifle at two hundred yards, and with a pistol at twelve paces; but they are not all Indian-fighters, and half of them know little or nothing of prairie-craft."

"What did ye bring them kind of boys out hyar for?" said Bill, in high disdain. "Do you happen to know what Blackbird means to do? Ef we was to stay away from them boys to-night, he'd have every hoss and mule, and every skulp, mebbe, before nine o'clock. That's what he's arter."

"Then let us hurry to their aid. They are waiting for me."

"Easy, stranger, easy. You don't 'spose Blackbird took all his men away, do you? I sorter reckon thar's ez many ez a dozen hid in the rushes along the bank thar, waiting fur us to come out. Which we won't, nobow."

"I must go to the aid of my men."

"I want you to. But don't let's make fools of ourselves. Thar's more'n one way out'n these hyar hills."

"I trust myself entirely to you," said Clinton. "All I ask is that you will act quickly, for I am anxious about my men."

Instead of leaving by the same course they had taken in entering the hills, Buckskin Bill turned the head of the mustang up the pass, and rode, for more than a mile, through a rough and devious path, emerging upon the other side of the low range of hills, which ran out nearly at right-angles to the river.

They emerged upon the bank of the river, in a little semi-circular glade, hemmed in by the hills.

"Got a lariat, hain't ye?" said Bill.

"Yes," replied Aubrey.

"Corral yer hoss, then. We kain't go no further on hossback."

"Just as you say, though I do not wish to lose my horse if it can be avoided."

"We kin come back hyar and git 'em ef we kin git cl'ar of the Blackfeet. I know whar your fellers are camped; passed it this mornin' when I kum up the river. Make the hoss fast, so that he kain't stray."

Of course the mustang which Buckskin Bill had "sequestered" had a lasso hanging at his saddle-bow. No Indian would ride without one. Bill cut a stake and drove it into the ground, tying one end of the lariat to the bridle and the other to the stake. Clinton followed his example, and the animals were secured. Bill now led the way to the river-bank, and found a light cottonwood log, which had been rolled up by the current. Upon this log he placed his rifle, shot-pouch and powder-flask. His revolver he placed in his beaver cap, and asked Clinton for his, which he placed in the same receptacle.

"Kin you swim?" he asked.

Clinton nodded quietly, and the two passed into the river, side by side, or rather with the log between them. The swift current soon took

them off their feet, and swimming stoutly, they reached the other bank.

"Tain't more than two mile to your camp from this," said Bill. "The river bends like a bow hyar, and I know'd the Blackfeet would have to follow the bend, ef they kept on that side of the stream. We cross the neck, and it ain't a quarter ez fur. Now come along."

"Why did you not cross with the horses?" asked Clinton.

"Wait till you see the road we've got to travel and you won't ask that," replied Bill. "We kin climb it, but hosses kain't. In the fu'st place, we've got to climb this hyar bluff."

Clinton looked upward with a comical face, as he saw the prospect before them. From the narrow ledge where they stood the bluff rose like a wall, with irregularities here and there, where an adventurous climber might find foothold. But the task was by no means an easy one, incumbered as they were with their weapons. There was no time to waste, and they commenced the perilous ascent, clinging to places where a cat could hardly have found foothold. They had hardly gained ten feet up the bluff when there came from above them a horrible cry, something between the sound of the human voice and the maniac laughter of the bald-headed eagle, and a heavy body came whirling down the steep above them, and struck the earth below with a dull thump. They looked down and saw at their feet the dead body of an Indian in his war-paint. They stopped at once and waited for new developments; but they heard no sound.

"Let's git back," whispered Bill. "I want to look at that Injun."

They hurried down, and turning the dead warrior's face uppermost, they looked at him closely. Beyond the bruises which he had received in his fall, and a fractured skull, caused by striking the rocks, there was no mark to indicate violence upon him. How had he fallen? Had a human hand hurled him down the bluff, or had he fallen by accident? The cry they had heard might have been wrung from him in his imminent danger, or it might have burst from the throat of the being who hurled him from the cliff. The warrior who had fallen was a man of stalwart frame, and no weak hand could have overcome him. Bill looked up with a baffled air, with his hand upon the breast of the corpse, and spoke in a low, hushed voice.

"I reckon I know the hand that throw'd him over the bluff," said he. "It ain't anybody but the White Demon."

"The White Demon?"

"Never heard of him, I reckon. Thar ain't a Blackfoot that lopes upon the plains, or skulks in the hills, but what knows and fears him. A strange critter, by all accounts. No man kin claim he ever see'd him, and yit we find his marks everywhar. I've found Blackfeet lyin' as ef they was asleep, and crept up to raise the'r ha'r. When I pounced on 'em I'd find 'em stone dead. That's the strangest thing about it, you know. The men he kills ain't got nothin' to show how they come to ther death."

"No marks of violence?"

"Not a mark. How the critter does it, I don't pretend to say. I've turned his work

over and over, and s'arched and s'arched, but it ain't been no use. I never could find nothin'."

"Strange. Have we anything to fear from this White Demon, as you call him?" said Clinton.

He don't tech white humans. That ain't his gait, you understand. It's Blackfeet he's particular keerful about rubbing out wharever he meets 'em, and he does it purty, too. I'd give this year's trappin' to know how he does it, but it ain't no use. Mebbe I wouldn't rub out the whole Blackfoot tribe ef I could! I don't owe 'em no good-will. But come, this ain't business, this ain't. Let's be gitting on our way."

They again addressed themselves to the ascent of the bluff, and reached the top after arduous labor. Here they found the marks of a desperate struggle, as if two men had tramped up and down the bluff in a deadly grapple. The turf was disturbed by moccasin-tracks of great size, evidently made in the struggle. Bill shook his head and led the way over a rocky and perilous path until they struck the river again, at a point where the smoke of a camp-fire rose against the summer sky.

"Them your men?" asked Bill.

Clinton took out a pocket-glass and examined the camp, which was yet half a mile away. Satisfied that it was his own, he told Bill it was all right, and they hurried to the river and signaled the camp. A rude raft was quickly pushed out from the shore, by means of which they were quickly transported to the other side.

CHAPTER III.

STELLA RAY.

A STRANGE camp it was, and such a one as can only be found upon the plains of the Far West, where men of all nations find a refuge and a home. Yankee, negro, Irishman, Dutchman and Mexican, formed this strange band of brothers. They were grouped carelessly about the fires, drinking and smoking and chattering among themselves. The Mexicans lounged about in picturesque attitudes, laughing but seldom, while the more volatile Frenchmen and negroes made the air vocal with their laughter. Here a lean, long-visaged Yankee could be seen regaling his hearers with some marvelous adventure of which he had been the hero, telling a wonderful lie without a change of expression. Buckskin Bill at once joined one of these parties, with the free-and-easy way peculiar to free trappers, and listened to the Yankee's tale, while Clinton stood near looking on with an amused smile.

"Seen a great deal of life, ain't ye?" said Bill, at length, when he had stood the sublime lies of the Yankee as long as he could. "'Pear to hev been 'round the world a good deal."

"Yaas," said the Yankee, "I've traveled some, that's a fact."

"Yit what you just told ain't a flea-bite to my experience," said Bill. "It's jest nothin' at all."

"But that ain't the best I've got tew tell, is it, say?" bawled the Yankee. "That's only a beginnin', that is! We was a-talkin' about suspended animation, wasn't we?"

"What is suspended animation?" said one of the men.

"Why, you born fool, don't you know?" replied another, in high scorn. "It's a man strung up by the neck. Now, s'pose the boys was to ketch you a-stealin' a hoss—an' like ez not they will—an' was to hang you up to that little tree, you'd be suspended animation, you would."

"You bet he would," was the universal chorus. "Ain't that what it means, Yankee Josh?"

"No, 'tain't," replied Josh. "Fur from it, I mou't say. Suspended animation means when a man looks to be dead, so still that you can't see him breathe a bit, and who gits back his breath arter a while, and walks. Waal, I was tellin' about a woman that lived down to Portland that dropped off that way, and laid for nine days without a motion or a breath. Cold as a stun, she was, but when she woke up she thought she hadn't bin asleep an hour. Fact!"

"Lie!" said Bill.

"Who said that?" demanded Yankee Josh, fiercely, grasping a stick which lay at his feet.

"I said it," said Bill, coolly.

"Say it ag'in, and say it kinder slow, so that I kin understand ye."

"I said 'twas a lie."

"That's a fact," said Yankee Josh. "I know'd it was a lie all the time. It ain't my story; quarrel with the man that wrote the book I read it in. I ain't got nothin' to dew with it."

"You're a cute varmint, any way," said Buckskin Bill, admiringly. "Blamed ef ye ain't. I'm ekal to most of 'em in tellin' a good square lie, but you lay over me, I guess. Howsomever, here goes for one try at you, anyhow. I used to go to Mexico, some years back, and when I was thar they executed a couple of men. Don't know what the rascals did, but I ain't got the least bit of doubt they orter been hung years before. Howso:ever, these men wasn't hung, but had their heads chopped off with a reg'lar old jack-knife of a thing they called a guillotine, thet sliced 'em off as neat as wax. I stood nigh when they shortened them by the head, and eza Greaser or so more or less ain't no sort of 'count to me, I didn't mind it. That ain't what I cum for, you know. But that mornin' a Mexican doctor I know'd asked me to cum into his office and hired me to stand by to help him when the time cum, cause he'd bought the right to make experiments with them ar' bodies. Course I didn't keer; 'twa'n't none of my funeral, you perceive, so I was thar. When the time cum the doctor yelled to me, and I snatched up a head and clapped it on one of the bodies and held it thar while the doctor fixed it on somehow, and then we laid it on a board, kivered it up, and four men started on a run with it to the doctor's office, whar they laid it on a bed. I follered them on a run, and old Alivero cum up puffing like a dying buffler. He'd got a thing he called a 'lectrical battory,' you never see'd such a masheen, all kivered over with brass fixin's that shone like gold. Well, he put one eend of a chain round the dead man's neck—he was dead, gentlemen, an' no mistake—an' put another on his hand. Then he set one of the men to turn a crank, and that turned a big glass wheel in a silk bag. When he did that the blood began to start from under the skin whar the

head was put on, and the only way the doctor had to stop it was to coat it over with some sort of plaster or other, and that stopped the bleeding. Gentlemen, I stood thar watchin' that corpse, and by gravy my blood turned to water when I seen his nose twitch, and the doctor put his hand on his breast.

"His heart beats!" yelled the doctor.

"Them critters the doctor hired to bring the body would have lit out, but we wasn't goin' to hev no seech nonsense as that, so I clapped the door to, an' swore I'd let daylight through the fu'st man that tried to run. That kept 'em quiet, fur the Greasers sort o' respected me, you bet. Then one of them went back shaking, and turned the crank ag'in. Then I see the body twitch all over, and its legs jerk, and I wanted to light out myself, but I wasn't goin' to show the white feather before a lot of Greasers, so I stuck. I locked that door so thet the durned fools couldn't run, and turned the crank myself. They fainted away in sections, so to speak, and the old ruffian of a doctor and me had it all to ourselves, me grinding away at the crank, and he jumping like a busy old thief ez he was. But, stars and garters, ef he didn't yell when he seen the body sit up and stare at us. Then I see what a durned mistake we'd made. Durn me if we hadn't put on the head with its face to the back."

"Haw, haw, haw!" roared the trappers. "That's a good 'un."

"Twan't that so much, nuther," said Buckskin Bill, "but when I cum to look at him I see I'd made another mistake. Ef I didn't go and put the wrong head on the body, I don't want a cent. Yes, sir, thar was Cospetto's head on Avelino's body, and him alive and sneezing, sitting on the table, with his back to us, and his face looking right at us."

"Hello," sez I. "What's the deal now? You ain't the right man!"

"I'd like to know what the deuce you are doing with me," said Cospetto-Avelino, putting his hand up to his neck and feeling all round. "It's my opinion you are up to some trick, and *corpo di Baccho*, I won't stand it at all!"

"Who are you any way," sez I? "I'm blamed ef I know. That's Cospetto's head, but it ain't Cospetto's body, by no means."

"I believe you lies," said this half-and-half, getting off the table slowly. "Hullo. You've turned my head round."

"All the better for you, ain't it? You kin see to walk backwards now, and you never could afore."

The notion kinder tickled the old villains—I kain't help speakin' as ef thar was two of 'em—and he laughed and backed up to me to shake hands.

"Paws off," sez I. "No liberties afore strangers. I'd ruther you wouldn't tech me."

"Why?" sez he, gruffly.

"Cause I'm in a fix about you. I promised to wring Avelino's nose the fu'st time I met him, but this ain't Avelino's head at all, so how the dickens am I to do it? Besides, your head ain't on very tight, and I might wring it off."

"So we parted good friends. Avelino-Cospetto lives on the Rio Grande now, and every one knows that it all happened jest ez I tell you."

"Tain't much of a story, but it's the best I've got."

"Pears like you can't invent a bit," said Yankee Josh, with a queer smile. "You was cognizant to all them sarcumstances individually, was you?"

"Wha-a-a-t? Say that ag'in!"

"You extended your personal attention over the remarkable event you have just narrated for our edification?"

"Now see yer," said Bill. "I'm a peaceable man nat'rally, but you r'ile me up and you make trouble in this camp. Don't be a fool now. Talk common sense."

"Did you see this yourself?"

"Is that what you wanted to know?"

"Of course."

"Then why didn't you say so? Cogni— Oh, holy Moses! Yas, I see'd it myself. But, Lord love your heart, that ain't no story, that ain't. I've seen men hung in Arkansas for telling better stories than that. Ef you kain't do any better, thar's a painful vacuum in this camp, and the sooner we git trampled on by a herd of buffler the better for the world."

"Oh, git eout! Thunder; look at that. Who is that?"

"Blest ef it ain't my little gal," said the trapper. "Now what in thunder did she come yer' for, right in the teeth of danger?"

He sprung up and hurried to meet a young girl who had just ridden into camp, and sat in her saddle, casting a sweeping glance over the place. By an involuntary impulse, every man in the camp rose, and saluted, as if to a superior officer. And well they might, for she was a veritable forest beauty. Her figure was slight, but framed with surpassing grace. Every rounded limb was perfection, and her form would have driven a sculptor mad. The face was piquant enough to be enchanting, and when the wind tossed her black ringlets about her flushed face it made her doubly beautiful. Her costume was of buckskin, with an overskirt of some dark brown stuff surmounted by a jacket of embroidered fawn's hide. In one hand she held her bridle, and in the other a small rifle of beautiful workmanship.

Her feet were clad in dainty moccasins worked with Indian skill. Upon her head she wore a scottische bonnet with a single eagle-plume thrust in the front. Altogether, it was an astounding apparition to the camp of Clinton Aubrey, who had not dreamed of seeing a woman after they left the last fort, except the Indian women, and even these were seldom seen. But this beautiful vision sat in the saddle, looking about her with an eager smile until her eyes rested upon the face of Buckskin Bill, when she bounded from the saddle, and ran to throw her arms about his neck, with a hysterical cry.

"I've been frightened, father," she cried. "Why have you staid away from me so long when you know I get tired waiting for you in the cave?"

"Don't know ez that give you any sort of right to come out of camp, and resk being taken by the Blackfeet?" said Bill, as angrily as he could.

"Ah, is there a horse in the whole Blackfoot

nation which could run with my pretty Fleetwing?"

"Perhaps not," said Clinton, speaking for the first time. "But you might be surprised."

"Not a bit. I am too well practiced in Indian ways."

"Bill," said Clinton, "introduce me to this lady."

"My darter," said Bill, rather gruffly. "But don't you mind her now, for the gal is put out about something, and I don't reckon I kin find out what it is, cause she's contrary when she has a mind to be."

"Your daughter?"

"Yes. What d'ye see so queer in that? Ain't a free trapper a right to a darter?"

"But, this is something extraordinary, and you must excuse me if I am surprised. Your daughter did not spring from the earth, did she?"

"No; she rode up from the foot-hill on her horse Fleetwing, and is tired to death of you already. Do come away, father, and let us go home. This young man is a Yankee, I know, because he asks so many questions."

"What's got into you to-night, my pretty?" said Buckskin Bill, soothingly. "Don't be hard on Capt'in Aubrey. He kin ride, and shoot and fight like a man. Once you know him you won't talk *that* way to him."

"Let's go away, father," persisted the girl. "I don't want to stay in this camp."

"Then you orter staid at home. I've as good as promised the capt'in to stand by him, and see him safe through the Blackfoot country. Now I don't want you to go with me. Thar's meat enough in the cave to last you six months, and ef I don't come back in one, you saddle Fleetwing, and strike the home trail. I'll bet you ride safe through, and that no man will have the spunk to lay a finger on you, nuther."

"I don't think he would," she said proudly, drawing up her straight form to its full height. "No man ever insulted Stella Ray yet. But enough of this. If you go through the Blackfoot country, so do I."

"But consider the danger," said Clinton, who was in a maze at this young creature's beauty and daring. "The country swarms with hostile Indians."

"Does it? As if I did not know that."

"Then the distance—"

"I do not propose to walk, sir. I have my horse."

"You are incorrigible, I fear. This is a rough place for a lady. My men are rough and rude, and may say things unsuited to your ears."

"You wrong our bordermen," she said, in a clear, ringing voice. "There is not one in your camp who would say a word to me he would not have said in the presence of his mother when he was a child. There, I am enrolled in your brigade."

And the new recruit coolly untied the larit and tethered her horse upon the prairie among the other beasts.

CHAPTER IV.

A PERILOUS HOUR.

THE men looked on in mute bewilderment for

a moment, and then the more volatile among them began to laugh, and the laugh was echoed by the beautiful girl, who came among them with an independent swagger, founded upon the free-trapper style, toying with a dainty pistol which hung in a spangled belt about her waist.

"I'm a surprise to you all, men," said she, looking about her. "What of that, when the world is full of surprises of one kind or another? Now I am with you, and must stay with you, until we pass through the Blackfoot country, and I expect you to make my words good, and not put me to the blush by anything you say or do. If that was to happen, even if we were in the most dangerous passes in the Indian country, I would mount my horse and ride away from you, and if I fell, my blood would be upon your heads. Enough; you all understand me."

The men cheered lustily, and not a man among these rough, untutored souls but felt that for such a woman he could even dare to die. Buckskin Bill had not said a word, and some one near wondered why he did not interpose his authority and prevent the girl from going with them.

"Interpose my— Holy Fly! you don't know what ye'r talking about, Gabe Rodgers, or you wouldn't make such a foolish remark. I hain't got no call to order Stell to do this and not to do that. She will do just as she reckons to be right, I opionate."

"I didn't know you were married," said one of the trappers.

"Didn't ye? Oh!" said Bill, scornfully.

"I thought I hearn you say onc't that you never was j'ined in them holy bonds."

"You old chowder-head of a clam," said Bill, in high wrath, "it wouldn't take much for me to bu'st you right square in the snoot."

Gabe Rodgers was a game chicken, and when he heard this lusty crow he rose and flapped his wings. A battle between the two guides seemed imminent, when a warning cry from the outposts let them know that danger was at hand. Instantly every man sought cover under the river-bank, which formed a capital earth-work, and peered out at the danger. It came in a shape they had least expected—a herd of buffaloes, of countless numbers, rushing down across the plain, bent upon reaching the stream.

"Take to the trees, boys, you that kin!" roared Buckskin Bill. "Stell, come hyar, I'll see arter you."

The girl ran to him, and he was about to place her on the raft and push off, when he became conscious that there was not a moment to lose, for the head of the column was scarcely a hundred yards away. Putting Stella on the raft, he gave it a vigorous push and sprung after her. The raft floated down the current with considerable speed, and Bill looked back to catch a glimpse of his companions. Some had secured their horses and were swimming the stream; others had taken to the trees, all unseen by the Indians harassing the flanks of the herd, who had not dreamed of the proximity of a white camp, until one of them caught a glimpse of a white face peering out of a tree-top, and fitted an arrow which he sent through the shoulder of the trapper. The answer was

a rifle-ball which laid the Indian dead in his tracks. High above the roar of the buffaloes rose the wild cries of the astonished Indians, as they fell back in dismay. As luck would have it, only the extreme edge of the herd of buffalo had struck the camp, and most of the Indians were on the other side. This solitary individual had paid the penalty of being too forward.

"Rubbed out!" said the trapper who had fired the shot. "Wonder how he liked it?"

The herd of buffalo, interposed between the Indians and their adversaries, and rushing on in a continued stream, prevented them from joining battle, and they could only shout defiance at each other across the narrow space, and shake their weapons threateningly.

The herd rushed on, plunging in desperation into the stream, which at this place did not rise above their shoulders. But the hindmost animals pressed upon those in front, and forced them forward at such a speed that many of them were drowned in the course of transit, and carried downward by the waves, which swelled to receive them. Buckskin Bill stood upon the raft, directing it in its downward course by means of the pole, and watching with interest the movements of the Indians, who, being engaged with the trappers upon the other side of the herd, did not observe him. Stella, who was naturally brave, sat upon the raft watching as keenly as her father, and really appearing to enjoy the wild scene before her, when she felt the raft shake, and the next moment a painted savage bounded upon it, hatchet and knife in his belt. It was Blackbird, the chief who had assailed the two men upon the prairie that very morning. Evidently, he had not expected to see Stella, for he recoiled with a gesture of surprise and pleasure, for no man appreciates female loveliness more than the Indian. Buckskin Bill heard the low, guttural exclamation, and turning quickly, he faced the savage, who advanced eagerly to the fray, and the two men grappled upon the raft, struggling to attain the mastery.

The iron sinews of the trapper-guide had been often tried severely, but never in his life had he felt his weakness as much as now, in the grasp of Blackbird. There was little room for their close and silent evolutions, and they stood like gladiators, straining for the throw. Down they went at length, with Buckskin Bill on top. But the fall was not necessarily a defeat, for the body of the Indian slipped like an eel from the grasp of the guide, who could only hold him by seizing him about the neck, a grip which he succeeded in obtaining at last. Neither of them had attempted the use of a weapon; indeed, so close had been the grapple, that it was simply impossible. At length the hatchet dropped from the grasp of Blackbird, and Stella snatched it up quickly, and bending over the struggling couple, waited for an opportunity to strike. She waited patiently and coolly until the proper time came, when both ceased their struggles from sheer exhaustion, when she struck full at the Indian's head. A savage "Ugh!" burst from the lips of Blackbird, and he released his hold upon Bill and dropped bleeding upon the logs.

Buckskin Bill rose slowly to his feet, shook

himself like a man who was quite wet, looked dubiously at the savage, and again took up the steering-pole.

"The sneakin' critter!" he muttered.

"Do you know him, then?" she said.

"Rayther. It's Blackbird, chief of the Blackfeet."

"That horrible wretch?"

"That's a matter of taste. He don't think he's no sech horrible wretch, by a big sight. Among the women of his tribe he's quite a dandy, but a brave one. He won't lope no more, he won't."

"Is he dead?" said Stella, in a hushed voice.

"I didn't mean to kill him, indeed I did not. I only thought to help you."

"Ye'r' a brave gal. You struck out like a man, and you didn't strike wild, as most any man I ever see would be apt to do. You jest waited until the right time come, and then struck."

"I have killed a man!" murmured Stella.

"Father, it is terrible to take the life of a human being."

"Human being! They ain't human, Blackfeet ain't, no more'n buffler. Lor'! I always thort you know'd that they warn't human. I c'u'd'a told ye that any time. Blackfeet human! Wal, that is a good one."

As he spoke he heard a splash in the water close at hand, and turning, saw that Blackbird had disappeared. The wily savage was cunning enough to lie quiet until a favorable opportunity occurred, and then rolled off into the water.

Bill uttered an angry oath, and seizing his rifle, waited for the savage to rise to the surface. He did so at length, but it was a hundred feet astern, as he had been swimming vigorously up-stream while under water. Bill had his rifle ready, and pulled, but no report followed. Calculating on this, the savage had managed, while lying across the weapon, to slip the cap from the tube. While Bill was fumbling angrily for a cap, the Indian buried himself in the rushes upon the river-bank, and was safe.

"What did I tell you?" roared Bill. "Do you call *that* human?"

"What, father?"

"Greasing off in that sort of a sneakin' way, when by rights his old skulp was my property, so to speak."

"I am not sorry he escaped, father; I really am not, for I should have no peace if I knew that I had killed a man. Let him go, and we ought to be thankful that it is no worse. Look out! the buffaloes are floating down this way."

"What I'm more afeard of is that them Injuns will come a-rairing and a charging down this way, too. The boys are keeping them busy jest now. What's that? Look, Stella—on both sides!"

The cause of his alarm was manifest. A dozen or more Indians had appeared up the river-bank, and were looking at them with longing eyes. Buckskin Bill thrust the pole into the bottom of the river, and called to Stella to do the same at the other end, and they held the raft fast where it was. This could not serve

them if the Indians began to use their bows, but this was evidently not their intention, for they were consulting hurriedly together. In a moment more Blackbird joined them, and from the shout of joy which at once arose, Bill was satisfied they were a part of his band.

"Oh, blame my cats ef this ain't too bad, now! Ef we had kept that pesky chief, they wouldn't dar' to tetch us. Now we ar' up a stump."

"What will you do?"

"Don't you fret, little 'un. I'll save you somehow, though I kain't figure it out jest now. Lord love your heart alive, ef them bufflers wa'n't in the way I'd show you how to do it. I'd go up the stream like a shot."

"But when you got to the buffalo-herd—what then?"

"I'd show you a trick. I ain't no guy, ef I do have fits. What do you say, I leave it in your hands now, shall we give up or try a desperate thing to j'ine our comrades, a deed which will be a dre'dful danger, but can only be death anyhow, and may save us."

"Action!" cried the heroic girl, with sparkling eyes. "Never surrender."

"That's what I call pluck, then," muttered Bill. "I kin trust you, my daughter. We kin only try it, and ef we fail, at best it can be no more than death, as I said afore, and death together will be better than life with them critters yonder. Hev you got strength enough to help push up-stream?"

"Try me," cried Stella.

"Up with your stick, then, and push with a will."

The Indians on the shore were just preparing to make an attempt to seize the raft and its occupants, when they saw it begin to move up-stream, under the united efforts of the heroic girl and her brave father. Blackbird only laughed, for he knew that they could not pass the herd of buffalo, still passing steadily through the flood, like the host of the children of Israel through the Red Sea.

"They come back," he said. "Can't go through buffalo."

Yet they pushed on as resolutely as if they really intended to pass through the herd, and with a shout of surprise the Indians saw them thrust the raft in among the stragglers upon the edge of the herd. Stella saw herself surrounded by a multitude of shaggy heads, short, curving horns, and glittering eyes. Ahead of them the mass of moving bodies was so dense, that it completely concealed the river from view. The Indians were now rushing up the banks of the stream, knowing that when Buckskin Bill was forced to come out from among the herd, he would be near the shore upon one side or the other, but they did not make due allowance for the indomitable courage of the man they followed. He was pushing the raft slowly onward, looking at the dense black mass in front, as hard to pass through as a wall, and nerving himself for the final moment. The buffaloes were getting angry at the presence of the raft, and one or two had given it a vicious stroke with their horns in passing, and one had manifested a desire to mount the raft. Bill picked up his rifle,

the last thing a trapper leaves as a prey to the enemy, and strapped it upon his back.

"Are you ready, Stella?" he cried.

"Ready," replied the girl, promptly.

Without a word more, he seized her in his arms, and bounding from the raft, lighted upon the back of the nearest buffalo. Of course the position was not tenable for a moment, and as the fierce animal snorted and plunged wildly, his unwelcome rider bounded to another hump, rising invitingly two feet away. It was a terrible, and yet a grand sight, to see this bold, brave man, with set teeth, flying hair, and firmly fixed face, leaping from buffalo to buffalo, choosing his beast with perfect nicety, and making his leaps with the greatest care, when he knew that a misstep would be death to him and her. The girl, too, was grand. Her face did not show any of that foolish terror which seems a part of woman's nature, but had a bright, determined look about it which was sublime. Behind them the Indians howled a dismal chorus, for they felt that whether they escaped or not, their prey had eluded them. The white men on the shore cheered them to the echo, while the Indians answered with despairing yells. But Buckskin Bill never flagged, and through that forest of tossing horns and glaring eyes, he bore his darling toward the shore. At length he reached a place where the herd was more scattered and his leaps longer. But he was now near the shore. As he gathered himself for the final effort, there was a rush of men, and the two were snatched from their perilous position, and landed safe, but out of breath, upon the trampled grass.

CHAPTER V.

THE WHITE DEMON.

YELLS of rage and disappointment showed that although the Indians appreciated the gallantry of the act by which the Buckskin trapper had escaped, they were far from pleased with it. The hunting-party which had just come up were a part of the band of Blackbird; they had been separated from him in the morning and knew nothing of the plans of the chief, or they would not have followed the herd in such a way as to throw his plans out of gear. They were dancing about angrily on the other side of the herd, which was now passing rapidly, when Buckskin Bill reached the bank.

"Come down from them trees, *you*," yelled the trapper. "Timber's a good thing enough, but don't sneak. Come out and be men; I would ef I was you. Don't sneak, for I can't bear it. Blame them Injuns."

The men who had been trained upon the prairie had not taken to the trees, and they gathered about the guide, who was not a whit frightened at his recent danger. Those in the trees descended and scattered themselves through the timber, just as the last buffalo plunged into the river, when the Indians, thinking to take them by surprise, made a charge. But a close volley poured in at the right moment, drove them back to the cover of the other scattered timber and the rushes on the bank. The voice of the chief was now heard calling angrily to his men, and they kept quiet in their cover.

"That means for them to lay low and keep

dark," said Bill. "He ain't no fool, that Blackbird. I sorter reckon thar ain't his ekal hyarabouts, and they wouldn't hev made that rush at us jest now, ef he had been with 'em. He were on the other side of the river. How do you feel, Stella?"

"I wish some one would look at my arm," replied Stella, calmly. "I think I am hit with an arrow."

It looked like it, certainly. A barbed arrow had passed through the fleshy part of the forearm, and the blood was dropping slowly, staining her fanciful dress. Buckskin Bill muttered a cry, and put his hands before his face, as he could not bear the sight of her flowing blood. Clinton Aubrey came forward with a pale face and asked to look at her arm, "I am a surgeon," he said, "and know what to do."

"I am not afraid," she said, with a bright smile, though the pain must have been great. "Do not think me a baby, to faint at the sight of my own blood. There."

He took the beautiful hand in his and laid her arm in the palm of his hand and looked at the arrow. It was a stray shaft which had struck her, for no one believed that even a Blackfoot would have aimed the shaft at her. The point had passed completely through, and showed upon the under side of the wounded limb, but the barbs still hung to the flesh.

"I am afraid I must hurt you a little," said he. "I must push the arrow through the flesh, as it is impossible to draw it back."

Clinton beckoned to the Yankee, who was standing near, and he came to assist.

"Turn your head away," whispered Clinton. "It won't hurt much, if you don't see it done."

She shook her head, and Aubrey forced the sharp barb through the flesh, while she gave no evidence of the great pain it caused her beyond a slight start. Then he broke off the head close to the flesh, and drew out the broken shaft. An Indian guide now came forward and produced a sort of salve much used on wounds of this kind upon the border, and they made a bandage, which was tightly bound about her arm. Clinton had a fanciful scarf wound about his waist, which he took off and formed into a sling, which he placed about the neck of the brave girl.

"Is it done?" asked Bill.

"All right," replied Clinton, and Bill removed his hands with a sigh of relief.

"I kain't thank you for doing that job so neatly, now, capt'in," he said, "but I'll find a time to do it in a way you kin appreciate. I'm too mad at them Blackfeet. I sorter reckon they'd better look out for me now. Shoot at a gal, eh?" he shouted, shaking his fist at the cover in which the Blackfeet had found refuge. "I'll make ye sick fur that."

The Indians were drawing off rapidly, for they had no hope of doing any great harm to the party, now that they were on their guard, but hoped to be able to make a night attack, which would at least carry off some of the horses.

The raft which had been abandoned by the guide had been taken possession of by some of the savages, who could now be seen by the party crossing the river near the point where Blackbird had boarded the raft to attack Buckskin

Bill. Two or three hot-headed fellows raised their rifles and would have fired at the party, but the guide stopped them again.

"Nothin' won't suit you unlest I knock your brains out, you great gumpies. Now what's the use? I don't count an Injun nothin', but he kin shoot an arrer from a bush, and what's the use of r'iling them without any reason? Let up, you 'tarnal critter, do! I never did see sech fellers. You shoot thet gun and I'll go through you like salts."

"I thought you hated Blackfeet," growled the man whose weapon the guide struck up.

"S'pose I do? That ain't a good reason for gitting the hull b'iling of us into trouble, is it? Now don't fool with me, 'cause I'm jest mad enuff to make you sorry for it afterward."

The man desisted, and all stood watching the party on the raft. They were five in number, and had left their horses upon the other side when they crossed to join in the assault upon the white man. Perhaps fifteen feet separated them from the bank, when a wild cry was heard and the gigantic figure of a white man bounded suddenly upon the raft, in the midst of the astonished savages, and a furious combat commenced. The new-comer carried in his hand a ponderous club, with which he made terrible work among the Blackfeet. The first blow of the resistless weapon swept two of them into the river, but the other three clung to him like cats, and struck desperate blows with knife and hatchet. From the place where they stood, seeing the blows he received, it was wonderful to the white men that this strange being did not fall. On the contrary, he seemed to pay no attention to their blows, but shooting out his long arm, grasped the strongest of the three who assailed him by the throat and dragged him from his hold, shrieking for help. In vain. The giant arm of the white foe rose above his head and hurled the Blackfoot into the boiling water in which the raft was floating. The other two would have fled, but again that powerful arm was outstretched, and dragged the savages back like kittens. A blow of the mighty fist laid one senseless, and hurling the other into the river, the giant stood alone upon the raft, with the exception of the Indian who lay beneath his foot, senseless. A yell of fury broke from the river-bank, and the name of the White Demon was borne upon the breeze to the ears of the white men above.

"The White Demon," cried Buckskin Bill. "I know'd it, I know'd it. No one but him could possibly have done it. Ha! did you see him sling that big Injun over his head? It takes a strong arm to do that."

The Indians were running frantically up and down the bank, looking at the White Demon, who, now that his work was done, floated down the stream at the mercy of the current, with his foot still bearing upon the breast of the senseless savage, and laughing at their futile attempts to reach him with their arrows.

"Who is the White Demon?" passed from mouth to mouth, and Bill was besieged with questioners. He had but one answer.

"Whatever he is, you ain't no call to be afraid of him, for he never harms white humans, he don't."

"What then?"

"Blackfeet, wherever he kin find them. I never see'd him afore in my life, and thar ain't a man I ever met that kin say any different. It is strange to me that he show'd himself. See him; the durned critter is laughing at them."

Still the raft floated on, and the savages raced upon the banks, keeping up with it as it floated. A thundering song came up the river, in a deep, resonant base, from the mouth of the White Demon. Thus, pursuer and pursued, they passed out of sight in the next roll of the prairie, and left the white men transfixed with astonishment upon the river-bank.

"Now is our time," cried Buckskin Bill. "We won't have a better. Git axes, every man that can use them for we've got to have a barricade ag'in' them devils when they come back. Good-luck pad the saddle of the White Demon, anyhow, for he has helped us out of a p'izon diffikilty."

Many of the Eastern men were lumbermen by profession, and their sturdy arms made quick work with the small prairie timber. Before it was too dark to work they had built a respectable barricade upon two sides of the camp, and left the timber in the rear, and the river upon the other side. This done, Buckskin Bill, who seemed to have taken matters into his own hands, posted guards chosen by himself, and then lighting a fire, cooked some venison steaks for himself and Stella, though she protested against it.

"You shot up, Stell. It's enuff fur you to git yourself into a diffikilty like this yer' without trying to cook arter it. Don't know how you kin eat, nuther, with that one hunt. Oh, ef I only know'd the Injun that shot the arrier at you, b'ilin' alive would be easy to the death I'd give him."

Thus grumbling, he put some of the juiciest steaks upon a tin-plate which Clinton Aubrey brought him, and cut it up for her. The rest of the party, with the exception of the guards, were soon busily engaged about the fires, cooking their evening meal. Concealment was useless now, for the Indians knew all about them, so they feasted to their hearts' content.

"Wait till morning and I'll give you a feast," said Bill. "Why, there'll be bufler enuff to feed a regiment, out thar. You bet on it, men. I'll show you how to cook a bufler-hump, ef you'd like to have me."

No one objected to this. Indeed, it was the universal verdict that this was the best speech they had heard from the lips of Buckskin Bill that day.

Then Stella sat down beside the guide, and rested her fair head upon his knee, while he said he would tell them a story.

"I'm an old man, boys," he said. "Least-ways, I begin to feel old, sorter, though mou't be I ain't fifty yit. But when a man lives for forty year or more on these plains, it seems a pretty long time to look back on. Thar ain't much change in our life, you know. Injuns, bufler and trappin'; that's all we know much about, somehow. I cum out on the plains with a party when I war twelve year old, and I've lived hyar so long, I've a'most forgot how long it really is, though, as I said afore, it kain't be

fur from forty year. I did used to try to keep the run of it onc't, but I guess I skipped a year or two somewhar. Most of the time, sence then, I've lived in the Injun kentry, between one post and another, trapper and guide, living from hand to mouth, as trappers have to do. What's that you've got in the little flask, capt'in?"

"Brandy," replied Aubrey.

"I don't believe it."

"There is only one way to prove it, then," said Aubrey, laughing.

"How's that?"

"By tasting it."

"You bet you," said Bill.

Aubrey gave him the flask, and he raised it to his lips. "Gurgle, gurgle, gurgle," went the liquid down his capacious throat, until his next neighbor, who was waiting anxiously, snatched it away.

"What you doing?" yelled Bill. "Don't you know any better than that? Nobody but a born'd fool would interrupt skientific res'arch. I cave, capt'in; it is brandy."

"You hain't left enough to sw'ar by," said the individual who had snatched it. "Now, ef ye are goin' to tell us that story, I wish you would. It will be a big lie, to begin with."

"Will it?" said Bill.

"I'd go iny bottom dollar on it," said the other.

"Now look hyar, Si Burrill, I know you, don't I? Want me to jump down yer throat, don't ye? Now look out; I'm b'ilin' over all the time, and like ez no', I'll light on you purty heavy."

"You ain't ekal to it, I opinionate," said the man known as Si Burrill.

"Ain't en? Hyar, Stell, let me go, will you? Don't go a-holdin' the old man down that way. That ain't fair, you know. He sez I kain't chaw him up, and I kin."

"Father!"

"What of it?"

"Did you not promise me not to quarrel?"

"But a man kain't be imposed on, you know," grumbled Bill.

"Si meant no harm. Go on with your story, and don't stop to quarrel."

CHAPTER VI.

A MUSICAL ENTERTAINMENT.

"GINERALLY gits the upper-hand of the old man, that gal duz," said Bill, pathetically; "and if the old man must tell the truth, he sort o' likes it. I'm goin' to tell you how I com to find my darter, or ruther howsech a blossom ez this comes to be with an old trapper out hyar on the prary. It's nigh onto sixteen year ago, or tharabouts, I war camping up hyar on the North Red. I war alone, you understand, and as the Injun signs war mighty thick, you bet I kept close. Mou't be about seven o'clock on a clear night I heard the Blackfeet yell, and s'pected to see them come bu'stin' in upon me, but it didn't come. The hullabullo was out on the pra'ry, mebbe a quarter of a mile away. I'd seen white signs that morning, and I calculated they was at some camp. 'Twas just about the time they ginerally come in on a camp, at dusk, or in the arly morning, that's the'r natural gait. I

know'd by the yells I couldn't do no good; they war too many for that, so I waited until the noise cooled down, and then I crept down to see about it. I was in a little lush-cover, creeping along, when the rush of Injuns passed me, p'r'aps a hundred in all, mad for blood. I know'd it war over then, so I crept down as quiet as I could, and found the camp.

"Boys, I'm an old man, and I've see'd some fearful bad sights, but that war the worst I ever see. It war a small camp, only four in all, two men and two women, dead and scalped. One of the women was young, and the other the wife of some trapper or guide. I know'd that by her dress. The lady, for she war a lady, war beautiful as an angel, ef what I've heard of angels counts for any thing. Thar she lay, and you'd have thought she war asleep, she looked so peaceful. Poor lady, her troubles were soon over.

"I war looking round and thinking what I'd do, when I heard a feeble little cry from under the wagon, which had been tipped over in the rush. I thought mebbe it war some one wounded, and I ran to look. Thar war a pile of old blankets under the wagon, and I pawed 'em over, and thar lay a little smiling creetur', holding up her hands for me to take her up. I thought to myself, 'This hyar little lamb hain't got father nor mother now; I'll do my best by her.' I picked her up, and thought I'd kerry her to camp, and do what I could to keep life in her. I'd got no further than the bushes and I see a horseman coming at full speed toward the camp. He war a tall, stout man, not very old, as I could see, and when he came to the camp he just give one cry, full of agony, put his hands afore his eyes and run away as fast as his horse could go. I bugged my little blossom tighter and went back to camp. Next morning I cum thar with a shovel, and thort I'd put 'em in the ground, but he'd been thar afore me, and the work war done. That little gal war Stell hyar, and I've done my best for her. I sent her to a school in a village, and when she war old enuff, I asked her what she'd do—stay thar by herself, or go with me. She thort that much of me that she wouldn't leave me, and hyar she is."

"But where do you live?" said Aubrey.

"I'll show you to-morrer. It's a place thet few could find, and when they found it, they'd be mighty keerful how they went into it. We pass it on our way to-morrer, when we go through the pass. Sence I've had Stell, I've staid at home most of the time, for I wouldn't leave her, even for a day, not ef I could help it. I told her to stay in the cave, but she disobeyed me this once."

"You know I am not afraid, father," said the girl. "Blackfeet know better than to chase me, for there is not a horse upon these plains can catch Fleetwing in a fair chase. I never was hurt before in my life."

"I hope your arm does not give you great pain, Miss Stella," said Aubrey. "It is partly my fault that you were hurt at all, and I should be sorry if my awkward surgery gave you great pain."

"You are not awkward," replied Stella. "You have dressed my wound in a masterly manner. I believe my father is not so very sorry I am

hurt, for it gives him a chance to pet me, and he knows I like that."

"Little gal," said the guide, fondly, laying his broad hand on her flowing hair and touching it caressingly, "you hadn't orter say I don't keer because you ar' hurt. I'd be right sorry to believe that."

"But this is a strange life for a young girl," said Aubrey, doubtfully.

"I know it," replied Stella, "but I like it dearly. There is a romance about it, a wild freedom, which I could not have in cities. When I am tired of wandering about in my strange cave and finding out new beauties in it, I mount my horse and take a dash over the prairie. If I meet Indians, I am off like the wind to my cave, and defy them to find me out. Oh, it is a wild, wonderful life I lead, as the Spirit of the Hills."

"Are you the Spirit of the Hills?" said Aubrey. "Then you are famous at the forts. The trappers and guides tell strange stories of your appearances and disappearances, and think you a veritable spirit."

"It is no wonder," she said, laughing. "No doubt I puzzle the poor fellows dreadfully. Yet I have done them some good in my time, and they know it. My father is a trapper, and when I see a chance to save any of them from destruction, I cannot be backward, even at a little personal risk. Father, I wonder what has become of Ben?"

"Who is Ben?" said Aubrey, looking a little troubled.

"Ben! The dearest fellow you ever saw. He has been by my side in danger's hour, and would peril his life to save mine. No one, not even my father, is more faithful to me than Ben."

"Some trapper, I suppose?" said Aubrey.

"My father's companion when he is not with me. He left me this morning to go in search of my father, not knowing that he went in the canoe. While he was gone I rode away, and doubtless he is searching for me everywhere. I am concerned about him, and hope he has fallen into no bad company, or been hurt. I am sure no one loves me better than Ben."

"Now, Stell—" began the trapper.

"Now, father, I am sure no one loves me better than Ben, and I quite dote upon him. He is handsome, too."

"Don't be mischievous, little 'un," said Buckskin Bill. "It's her dog, gentlemen; I forgot to speak of him. She has never been out without him afore, and I don't know where he is."

At this moment a deep, resonant lay sounded upon the plain outside the camp. Buckskin Bill put his fingers to his mouth and whistled. A moment after, a dark body shot over the head of the Yankee, who crouched low in surprise, and put his hand upon a weapon. The new-comer was a beautiful hound, of mixed breed, with the chest and shoulders of a lion. He sawned upon Stella, and received her caress as his due, went to Buckskin Bill and put his tawny muzzle against his face, and then came back to lie at Stella's feet, blinking at them with fiery eyes.

"Thunderation!" said the Yankee. "Ain't he a beauty, though!"

It was a beautiful hound, and one that would

have made a bad enemy to encounter. Standing nearly three feet high, with muscular flanks and strong jaws, he could have dragged down a buffalo bull with perfect ease.

"Don't know how it is, boys," said Buckskin Bill, "but that dorg is the strongest critter you ever see. A musical genius, he is. He will sing like an angel, you bet."

"That's tew much, yew know," said the Yankee. "I've hearn of learned dogs afore now, but I never found one yet that could sing."

"Sorter doubt my words, don't ye?" said Bill, in high scorn. "Now what mou't your name be, mister?"

"Wal, when I'm tew hum, they spell my name Josh—J-o-s-h—Perkins—P-e-r-k-i-n-s. Out here they say it short, and call me Yankee Josh. But that ain't it. I ain't got no call to believe any dog kan sing."

"All right. Now I reckon it won't be hard to prove it, mister. Stella, you ain't got your guitar, hev you?"

"I've got my flute," said Stella.

"That'll do, I reckon. Play something lively, then. I'm goin' to show ye fu'st that he kin dance, and then that he kin sing. Try 'Saint Patrick's Day in the Morning' Stella."

The girl produced the piece of a flute from the pocket of her dress, and then looked at her father in despair. She could not use her right arm.

"Now blame my cats ef I didn't forgit that," he said. "Wal, give me the flute. I ain't much of a player compared with Stella, but I'll do my best."

He must have had a wonderful idea of Stella's musical powers, if she was a better player than he was, for he handled the flute like a master. Every note came out round and full, and an Irishman who had been dozing over the fire, started as if from a dream, for the flute almost seemed to speak the words:

"Have you seen my man, my man, my man,
Have you seen my man, looking for me?
He wears a blue jacket, a pair of white trousers,
A hole in his coat, he is blind in one eye."

Starting up with a Tipperary yell, he broke into a frantic jig, accompanying the music, and commenting something in this style:

"Are we all from west of Athlone, ye devils? Heel and toe, b'ys. Cut an' come ag'in. Whoo! The devil fly away wid ye all, and God bless St. Patrick, that banished the frogs and toads!"

The Irishman was not alone in his wild dance. At the first note of the flute the hound pricked up his ears, and moved uneasily in his place. All at once he sprung to his feet and commenced a wild dance, if dance it might be called, lifting one foot after another, bounding upright, and keeping the most perfect time. The whole camp was in a roar. Even in the presence of danger, nothing can keep down the exuberant spirits of the free trapper. They laughed loud and long at the grotesque attitudes of man and dog, and shouted encouragingly to them:

"Keep it up, Tim; never say die. Hurray! That's the ticket. Who cares for a cent. For the credit of your country, don't stop for any dog. Don't let him beat ye, Tim. Go it dorg. That's the best purp I ever seen in my born

days, an' he's worth his weight in beaver pelts. I'll give that fur him. Hi, hi!"

Every trapper was on his feet, shouting varied notes of encouragement and Bill played on until he was fairly black in the face. But all things must have an end, and his wind went at last in an expiring squeak.

"Thar, I cave," he gasped. "Now, d'ye say he kain't dance?"

"Didn't say he couldn't dance," roared Josh. "Said he couldn't sing, and no more he can't."

"Can't, eh? We'll try that. Stella, would you mind giving the boys a song?"

"Not in the least," said Stella.

"Something lively first," said Bill.

Without speaking of a cold or any of the petty excuses young ladies use when they wish to be teased to sing, the girl struck up a beautiful song, then much in vogue. The dog was lying at her feet again, and as she sung, looked up in her face, but lay quiet. She had a wonderful voice, and Aubrey, who was himself a fine amateur musician, applauded warmly. The men applauded vociferously, and the Yankee laughed loud and long.

"I guess that will satisfy you, Mr. Buckskin Bill," he said. "Now don't try to fool men like us. Sing! He kain't sing. Thar ain't no living dog kan sing."

"Kain't, eh?"

"Of course not."

"P'raps you'll be willing to resk something on that ar'."

"Wal, I'm always ready for a trade that ar' way," said Josh. "What'll yew bet?"

"Bet you the best pair of beaver-pelts I've got to home, ag'in' that knife of yourn."

"I'll dew it," said Josh.

"I've got the right to try two songs on him, ain't I?" said Bill.

"Try jest as many as you please. The dog can't sing."

"Wal, ef he don't I lose the pelts, I judge. Now, Stell, sing the boys another song like the one you sung jest now."

Stella obeyed promptly, and the dog still lay at her feet blinking sleepily, apparently enjoying the music, but not in any way showing a desire to "sing." Bill looked crestfallen, and Josh again laughed.

"Pshaw. I know'd I was robbing you," said he. "Come, do you want to double the bet?"

"I'll make suthin' or go bu'sted," growled the other, angrily. "Yes, I'll bet two more beaver-pelts thet the dog sings this time."

"What, ag'in?" said Josh.

"That belt of yourn."

"Don't think I can make a couple of beaver-pelts easier," said Josh. "I'll bet yew."

"All right, said Bill. "I forgot to tell yew he were a Methodist dog, and won't sing nothin' but Methodist hymns. Try him with 'Come yo disconsolate,' Stell."

The moment Stella began to sing that well-known camp-meeting hymn, the dog raised his head, and joined in with the most dolorous howl which ever issued from the mouth of any animal. He seemed to tune his pipes by the rising or falling of the notes. When her voice sunk, so

did his; when she struck a high note, he howled frantically, making the prairie ring. Stella sung on, accompanied by the dog, while the trappers were so weakened by laughter, that an assault at that moment would have found them utterly helpless. When she ceased, the dog, with a deep sigh of relief, dropped his head.

Josh looked steadfastly at the brute for a moment, shook his head slowly, and lifting the knife and belt which lay at his feet, passed them to the guide, saying, simply:

"Take 'em, Bill."

Bill had reached out his hand for the knife, when he suddenly paused with extended arm, and his eyes fixed upon the river in front. A hush fell upon the camp.

CHAPTER VII.

"SLEEPY JOE'S" NAP.

WHAT had drawn the attention of the guide, in the moment of his triumph?

Every eye followed the direction of his gaze, but could see nothing.

"Sit down, every man," he whispered.

"And don't mind me nor follow me. I smell woolen."

He stood irresolute for a moment, and then walked slowly away from the fire, vanishing in the darkness. Unperceived by any one, he had made a signal to the dog, for the animal rose, shook himself like a lion aroused from his lair, and then followed silently in the footsteps of his master. Five minutes of fearful suspense followed, and then came a sudden yell of mingled terror and surprise from the rushes upon the river-bank, and the sound of a confused struggle. The guide's voice was heard, rising above the din, shouting words of encouragement to the dog, while he himself seemed to be engaged in a fearful struggle. Snatching up a blazing brand in one hand, and drawing a pistol with the other, the young captain ran down to the scene of conflict, followed by three or four of the more daring spirits, and found the guide engaged in a desperate grapple with an Indian in his war-paint. The two were rolling over and over upon the hard sod, panting for breath, while the hound stood over a prostrate savage, whose breath had fled at one grip of those powerful jaws. They seized the Indian fighting with Buckskin Bill and dragged him to his feet, and revealed the face of Blackbird, wild with the ardor of battle.

"Dogs of white men," he hissed. "Blackbird, son of Rolling Thunder, laughs you to scorn. You are children. A Blackfoot girl would laugh at such warriors as you."

"Secure him," replied Aubrey quietly. "We will keep him as a hostage for the good conduct of his men. Bring him out into the light and let us see him."

"Beware how you degrade me with bonds, white dog that you are. Blackbird will eat your heart. He will dance at a stake when the flames are rising about it and you cry out in pain like a little child. Why do you not take a hatchet and drive it into my head, that I may not dance at your death-fire?"

"Never mind him," said Buckskin Bill. "The red thief wants us to kill him. Tie him as tight as you can."

The Indian, seeing that he could not escape the indignity, submitted with the natural stoicism of his race. Stout bands of buckskin were drawn tightly at his ankles and knees, and his hands secured behind him. Bound in this way, he could not move hand or foot, and could only lie prostrate upon the earth.

"I seen his eyes shine in the dark," said Bill. "That's what made me go for him. Come away, Ben. That Injun's troubles is over. He won't steal no more hosses. Blackbird, I'd like to ask you one question. Did you ketch that chap they call the White Demon?"

"Blackbird will not speak," said the Indian sullenly.

"I know how it is," said Bill, speaking to Clinton. "The Blackfeet are all as 'fraid as death of this White Demon, and would ez soon lose the'r scalps ez to come within reach of his hand."

"The white trapper lies!" cried the Indian. "Blackbird does not fear the White Demon. He runs like a deer. Is Blackbird to be blamed because the White Demon has longer legs than he has, and can run faster?"

"It's all right," said Bill. "I thought I could git it out of him. They didn't ketch the White Demon. Thar, lay down, Blackbird, and keep jest ez cool ez you kin. 'Tain't no use to git catawampous, you know, because we've got you fast. I opinionate that your chaps had better know that you ar' a pris'ner, and they will fight shy of us."

"Fool!" hissed Blackbird. "I will kill you."

"Not ef I know it," said Bill, coolly. "You make a motion to git up, and you won't kill nobody. Dead men never do."

Blackbird remained silent, and Bill went down to the river-side and shouted in the Indian tongue the information that Blackbird was a prisoner, and would be shot if they made any assault. There was no reply to this for some moments, but in that mysterious way which only Indians know, the news was passed from mouth to mouth, and directly after a low wail of disappointment was heard all about the camp.

"The thieves were gathering for a rush," said Bill. "I guess we've blocked the'r little game now. They don't dare to strike at us while the'r chief is in danger. We may ez well take a snooze—them that needs it. I'll keep watch of our friend Blackbird for two or three hours, and when I git tired I kin call up one of the boys. But fu'st I must find a place for my little gal to sleep."

"Never mind me, father," said Stella. "I can sleep anywhere."

"You git out. Your arm pains you now, I kin see it in your face, though you wouldn't tell of it ef you was undergoin' grindin' torments, you little rascal. You'll be better asleep, and I know it."

He went round among the pack-horses and procured a number of buffalo-ropes and blankets belonging to the men on duty, and made a soft couch for Stella at the foot of a tree. This fatherly task accomplished, she was soon sleeping the sleep of innocence, with her head leaning on her left arm, and the right, wrapped in the scarf, lying across her bosom. Buckskin Bill sat down at the foot of the tree, between Stella

and the captive Indian, and lighting his pipe, he laid his rifle across his knees and began his lonely watch.

The hours wore slowly on, and still the guide sat smoking at the foot of the tree, pausing every time he knocked the ashes from his pipe to look at the recumbent figure of his captive, but always leaving that unlovely picture quickly to look at the placid face of his sleeping child.

"They kain't do any thing ez long ez I kin keep Blackbird in reach of my hand," he muttered. "But ef he was to git away, look out for squalls. I guess I'll wake up one of the boys and take a snooze myself. This has been a busy day for me—powerful busy, all on account of the cussed Blackfeet."

He touched the nearest trapper on the shoulder, and he awoke grumbling, and picked up his rifle with a sulky air.

"You couldn't have picked out no one else ef you tried," grumbled the man. "I'm dead beat out, and ef you was wuth a cent you'd know it too. Thar, that's enuff; lay down and snore."

Bill paid no attention to his growling, knowing that any man in the camp would have considered himself aggrieved if he had been chosen to watch, but, taking the grumbler's blanket, he rolled himself up in it, and was asleep almost as soon as his body touched the earth.

Buckskin Bill had made an unfortunate selection, not knowing the man personally. He was a perfect Rip Van Winkle in the matter of sleep, and when once he had lain down, it was impossible for him to keep awake until he had had his nap out. Blackbird, who was sleeping with one eye open, saw that he had a drowsy guard, and became instantly on the alert, watching for a chance to escape. The guard nodded drowsily, and his pipe fell from his mouth.

The chief now began to roll himself slowly away from the fire, with his eye upon the guard. The knife which Yankee Josh had offered the guide lay neglected upon the earth, not three feet away, and his aim was to get possession of it. It is impossible to describe the snake-like caution with which the wily chief proceeded, rolling a little way, and then lying in the same position, with head slightly raised. At last, by imperceptible degrees he reached the place where the knife lay. It was still in its sheath, and how was he to draw it? The Indian was fertile in invention, and rolling over on his face, he seized the handle in his mouth and drew the bright weapon from its sheath, and again lay down on his back, holding the knife firmly.

How was he to use it? His hands were tied behind his back or he could have quickly severed the bonds upon his lower limbs. Hesitating for a moment and seeing that the camp was still quiet, he managed to sit erect, and turning his head, dropped the knife over his shoulder. Groping for it with his bound hands, he contrived to seize it and get the point upward between his palms. Working it up and down, and cutting his hands severely in the act, he succeeded in insinuating the point into the knot of the buckskin thong upon his hands, and bore down upon it. The buckskin parted, and the hands of the savage were free.

A hasty man would have leaped up at once and escaped. Not so with the wily Blackfoot,

who was far too sagacious for that. He simply rolled himself back to his old position, and lay there, with his hands still under him, still holding the knife. At this moment the guard, losing his balance as he slept, bumped his head against the tree and awoke with a start. Angry at himself for falling asleep, he started up and came to look at his prisoner. He saw nothing wrong, and did not know of the knife which the savage held in his hand, and which he would have buried to the hilt in the breast of the guard if he had stooped down. But, seeing the bonds upon his legs all right, he took it for granted that the hands were in the same condition, and went back to his place and lighted another pipe. With sublime patience the Indian lay until the sleepy fit came upon the guard again, and the pipe dropped from his mouth, and, leaning his head against the tree, he slept as soundly as any of the others. Then the Indian bent forward and severed the bonds which confined his legs.

Even now he did not attempt to rise, for the ligatures had for a moment deprived his limbs of their strength. He waited until the blood was coursing with its old vigor through his veins, and then began to creep away from the fire, keeping his eyes upon the sleeping guard. To get out of the camp, he must either take his way over the barricades, at which he knew guards were posted who would not sleep, or else take to the river. But, directly in the path he must take to reach the river, lay two enemies. The nearest one was Buckskin Bill, wrapped in his blanket, and the next was the dog, who lay near the bank of the stream, with his head upon his paws, fast asleep. Blackbird had a wholesome dread of the dog, whose prowess he had seen exemplified in the death of his companion, a few hours before, and the Indian knew that he was no match for the wary brute unless he could kill him at the first blow.

But the immediate danger was that Buckskin Bill would wake, and, from his experience of his strength, the Indian had no desire to try his prowess that night. There was only one way—from the place where Bill lay to the river was barely twenty feet, and he could clear it in two leaps. Gathering himself, he flew into the air like a ball, and alighted close to the side of the dog, who bounded up with a roar like a lion, and made a savage snap at the body which flew over him and alighted in the river with a loud splash. The moment he struck the water he sunk from view, and the baffled hound raved up and down the bank mad for his blood.

Wild confusion reigned in the camp. The sleepers started up and looked for their prisoner, and found only the severed ligatures upon the grass. The knife he had taken with him. With a roar of disappointment, Buckskin Bill raised his hand and dealt "Sleepy Joe"—the nickname of the unlucky guard—a blow which raised him from the ground and sent him flying backward, striking the ground with a loud bump.

"Take that, you sneaking, sleepy son of a fool!" roared the irate scout. "It would sarve you right ef I was to raise your ha'r this blessed minnit."

The men who had been awakened questioned him, but Buckskin Bill was too angry to make much reply.

"Don't ask me, none of you. Ef we had kept Blackbird with us, we mou't have marched through the middle of the Blackfoot country, and not a man would have dared to peep. As it is now, it will be fight, worry and watch night and day. Thar, git your guns, every man. Like ez not, we'll have a dash at us ez soon ez they find out that Blackbird hez escaped. Let me git at that Sleepy Joe. I'd like to bu'st him right in the snoot."

"If you would allow me to hazard an opinion, I should say you had done that already," said Clinton, laughing. "Come, Bill; it's no use to cry for spilled milk, as the saying is, though I will put no faith in that man from this day. No sleepers in my camp. Hark!"

A long, low, tremulous cry arose on the night air, coming from the bank of the river, perhaps two hundred yards below the camp. It was immediately answered from every side, and then a wild chorus of exultant cries told that the savages understood that their chief had escaped.

Bill looked daggers at the somnolent trapper and made an advance in his direction, but Sleepy Joe ensconced himself behind Aubrey.

"Now, don't let him tech me, cap'n," he whined. "It mou't happen to any man."

"Didn't you go to sleep?" roared the wrathful guide.

"Mou't be I did; what of that? Ef you'd 'a' know'd putty, you would have picked out some 'un else, you would. I kain't keep awake when I'm waked up afore my nap is out."

"Constitutional sleepiness," said Stella, who was wide awake now. "Don't blame him, father."

"'Tain't no sech thing. Constitutional! It's the most unconstitutional thing I ever heard of in my life. Oh, blame my cats ef it ain't enough to make a man rise right up and howl!"

"Enough of this!" said Aubrey, assuming the air of the captain. "You were unfortunate in selecting this man, who is a good enough guide, apart from his infernal propensity for sleeping. I do not think they will attempt to touch us this morning, for they know we are aroused and on the watch. Seely, Berthold, Pat Murphy and Bordeaux, remain awake and strengthen the guards. The rest of you may lie down again. I will not rest any more to-night."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE STRANGER.

MORNING came, and no attack. Blackbird was too old a "bird" to make an assault upon a camp where every one was on his guard, ready and waiting for an attack. When morning broke, not an Indian was to be seen. The horses were saddled, the pack-horses received their loads, and the whole cavalcade started. Looking over the plains, nothing could be seen of the savage band which had that morning assailed them, but Buckskin Bill knew only too well that they had not given up their design of attack, and that Blackbird would harass them to the very confines of their territory, and even to the country beyond. They were now approaching a section full of danger, for the passes of the

mountain showed in front, and from the numberless by-ways which led into the main path from every side, a lurking foe could pour his arrows into their ranks. But the volatile trappers had already recovered from their fright, and were "larking" with one another, and playing tricks upon Irish Pat and Bordeaux, the Frenchman. One of them had stolen the Frenchman's hat, and insisted upon it that Pat had eaten it.

"You see, it looked like a big potato," said Bill, "and Pat likes potatoes. 'Twa'n't a decent kind of hat for any one to kerry on his head, nuther. I'm glad it's gone."

"*Le bon chapeau!* Ah, *ciel*, Monsieur Bille, vat you say? Zat ze Irisher eat him? Be gar, he lay hard on he stomach; he all grease!"

"Irisher yerself, ye parkvool!" yelled Pat. "Don't ye sp'ake a word til me now, or I'll b'ato the head av ye."

"That ain't fair," said Buckskin Bill. "You eat a man's cap, and then want to lick him because he don't like it. That ain't what I call a fair shake, nobow. What's the matter with Ben, Stell? Looks ez ef he smelt a Blackfoot."

The dog was growling fiercely, and the bristles upon his back stood up like spikes. He was looking in the direction of a clump of bushes which lay in the path. Bill called the band to a halt, and pointing with his hand, sent the dog forward, and followed as fast as his horse could go. When he reached the bushes he gave a shout, and beckoned to his companions to come on.

The band spurred forward and reached the bushes, to find the buckskin guide bending over in the saddle, looking down upon the dead body of a Blackfoot brave, who lay upon his back, looking as calm and placid as if asleep. Over him stood the dog, with erected bristles, not offering to touch the body.

"Did the dog kill him?" said Aubrey. "It was quickly done."

"The dog didn't tech him," replied Bill. "He was dead a long time, and Ben will never tech a dead body."

"Who killed him? I can see no mark of violence."

"The White Demon has been at work," said Bill. "It's a curious thing, but when he kills a Blackfoot outright and leaves him on the plain, he don't leave any marks upon him. I'm glad the White Demon is on the trail, for he won't do us any harm and he mou't hurt the Blackfeet and scare them away."

"What shall we do with the Indian?" said Aubrey.

"Let him lie where he is. Blackbird will find him and give him burial. I'd like to know something more about the White Demon, but I don't know how to work it out. Ride on. Come to heel, Ben."

The dog left the body of the Indian, and took his old place beside the trapper's horse, and they rode on over the plain toward the mountains. The ground was gradually rising into foot-hills, and the sage-bushes began to show thicker. At the suggestion of Buckskin Bill, the captain sent out six picked men to beat the bushes upon both sides of the path, and see that no foe

lurked in their depths. They had not ridden a hundred yards, when a warning cry was heard, and the whole body spurred on, to find the videttes parleying with a single man, who had dismounted, laid his rifle across his saddle, and was warning them back.

"Don't be a fool," shouted one of the men. "Don't ye see we ar' humans?"

The man was not to be blamed if he had grave doubts in regard to this fact, for the free trapper is much given to bedizening his carcass after the Indian fashion. The sun and wind tans their faces to nearly the same hue as their copper-colored enemies, and they wear the fringed leggings and moccasins worn by the Blackfeet. In addition to this, their hats are adorned by fluttering knots of ribbon of varied hues, and, at a little distance, it is next to impossible to tell a party of trappers from savages.

"Who are you?" demanded the single man, still menacing them with the rifle. "Speak, and do not be over-tedious in your answer, for I am rather quick-tempered, and might fire."

"You need have no fear," said Clinton Aubrey, riding forward. "We are white men on our way to Oregon."

The man unlocked his rifle and sprung into the saddle, coolly awaiting their approach. He was a man of large frame, with powerfully-developed muscles, armed in hunter fashion, and dressed in the same style.

"May I ask who you are?" said Aubrey. "It is not often we meet lonely white men in these hills."

"Nevertheless you see me here," said the other, quietly. "My name is Garrett, though I do not see of what use it can be to you. With your permission I will ride with you, as you seem to be going my way."

"We shall be glad of your company, for you look like a man who is accustomed to Indian wiles. Have you seen any Blackfeet this morning?"

"Yes. A party of nearly a hundred passed me, when I lay hidden in the sage-bush half an hour ago."

"Did you know them?"

"Yes. It was the band of Blackbird."

"Then you know the rascal too?"

"Few, who have ever lived in this country, do not know the vile wretch. Do you propose to ride directly into his trap?"

"Not ef we know it," said Bill.

The new-comer looked at the speaker with a strange smile.

"I have heard of you, too, my man," he said.

"You have made a good reputation on the border, old true-blue. No, I don't think you are likely to run into a trap, but it don't hurt to know where the danger lies. If you go up the main pass into the hills, you will be assailed in its narrowest part, and shot down before you have a chance to save yourselves. Don't you think we had better try Brown's Canyon?"

"You bet," said Bill. "Stranger, were mou't I hev met you afore?"

"You might have me in a number of places," replied the stranger.

"Yaas; I know I mou't. But where *did* I meet you?"

"Impossible to say. Let us ride on, for Blackbird may send forward spies to see that we enter the pass. Let us try a little strategy. Send the six men in advance, who met me just now, and let them go part way up the pass. The Indian spies will fall back before them, and when they get out of sight, let the men make for Brown's Canyon as fast as they can go. We will be through the pass and in their rear before they know it."

"A good play," said the captain. "What do you think, Bill?"

"That's the way to do it," replied Bill.

Aubrey gave the order, and the six men pushed off in advance, while the rest of the party, after following them a little way, turned off into the tangled sage-bush to the right, guided by the trapper and Garrett, who seemed to take the lead as his right. For over half a mile they broke through a rough and difficult path, Clinton Aubrey taking charge of Stella, and finding in the end that she was more of an adept in managing the beautiful horse she rode, than he was in such a path as this. At length they came to the mouth of a pass so dark and narrow that some of the men muttered that it looked like going into a grave. But into this gloomy pass Garrett and Buckskin Bill plunged, closely followed by the others, walking their horses at the order of the guides, so as to awaken no echoes upon the hard path.

"There is no telling how far a Blackfoot can hear a horse's hoof," said Bill, "'cause they are such natural born thieves that they can *smell* a horse a mile off. Single file now. Thar ain't room for anything else."

The pass was a strange one, a sort of cleft in the rocky hill, just wide enough for the party to pass through one at a time. They pursued their course for a mile, when they were joined by the men who had been sent into the other pass, who reported that they had obeyed orders, proceeding to a certain point, and then returning, after satisfying themselves that the Indians were in front of them. All at once the canyon ended, as abruptly as it began, and then they emerged into the larger pass, in the rear of the savage band, waiting for them below.

"I am determined not to suffer these Indians to dog us longer, without feeling that we can strike," said Aubrey. "Is there any way to get at them?"

"It is easy enough, if you have the will to do it," replied Garrett.

"Try us," said Aubrey, sternly. "I do not think you will find us wanting."

"Put the lady in charge of a man or two and leave her here," said Garrett. "And then follow me. Doubtless, as they do not expect us, we can steal upon them unawares, and cut them down. Curse the Blackfeet, let them die!"

"You hate Blackfeet, then?" said Aubrey, looking at him.

"*Perhaps*," said the man, quickly. "If you have seen what I have of the cruelty of the Blackfeet, you would not wonder that I hate them, and would like to see them cut off from the face of the earth."

"You need leave no man with me," said Stella. "Ben is as good a guardian as I want, and then I have my rifle."

"Let one of the men stay, Stella," said the guide.

"No; if you mean to attack this band, ride on, and God be with you."

They led their horses silently down the pass, leaving Stella sitting in the saddle, and the dog crouching at her feet. The pass widened as they proceeded, and in a few moments they were called to a halt by Garrett.

"I will go forward and reconnoiter," he whispered. "Wait for me."

He hurried away, and for five minutes they stood beside their horses. Then, silent as a creeping ghost, the man came back, and taking his bridle from the hand of Buckskin Bill, who had been holding his horse, raised his hand, and the men formed in fours, as the pass was wide enough to permit it, and rode on slowly. The Indians were grouped together in a little opening, waiting for the signal of their spies, who had gone out again when it was found that the white vedettes had fallen back, and were not looking behind them, until the appalling battle-shout of the trappers rung out upon the clear air of the morning, and they burst in upon them wild with the ardor of battle, pouring in one deadly volley before they charged with knife and hatchet. Four of the enemy dropped, while others were desperately wounded. Blackbird saw his danger, and shouted an order to the men. Obedient to his word, they slipped out of the saddle, and dashed up the steep sides of the pass, from which secure elevation they commenced a galling fire of arrows upon the exposed trappers. Though not a very dangerous weapon at long range, the arrow is a fearfully embarrassing one for cavalry, and the horses of the rangers reared and plunged with long arrows sticking in their sides.

"Fall back!" shouted the captain. "Reload your pieces."

This was precisely what Blackbird wanted. Thirty or forty of the men slipped down, and each secured two horses, with which they vanished down the pass at a headlong gallop, as they had not dared to do while the trappers were close upon their heels. The remainder set up wild yells of execration, and vanished over the ridge.

"Shall we pursue them?" said the captain.

"No sech fools," said Bill. "Git into an ambush."

"I hate to see them escape," growled Garrett. "However, it is useless to pursue, but we turned the tables on them nicely. How Blackbird started when he saw us come bursting from the pass, in their rear. It was a hot little skirmish while it lasted. Have you got a sharp knife, Buckskin Bill?"

"Thar's one," said Bill. "What do you want with it?"

"I've got an arrow in the hand, replied Garrett, "and it does not feel very well, I assure you."

"Let me attend to it," said the captain. "I am a surgeon."

He produced a case of instruments from his saddlebags, and removed the arrowhead from the hand of their new ally. When this was done, he went round among the party, cutting the annoying weapons from the flesh of the

horses. When this was done they turned back, satisfied that they had given the band of Blackbird a lesson. Riding on at a leisurely pace, they were startled by the crack of a rifle in front, and a hoarse bay from the dog.

"I forgot," cried Bill. "Git out of the way, you!"

Followed by Clinton and Garrett, the guide dashed up the pass to the place where they had left Stella. As the pass opened they saw her, and Buckskin Bill darted forward with an oath of rage. One Indian lay writhing on the sod, another was struggling in the grip of the dog, and a third was dragging Stella from the saddle, in spite of her struggles. The three had straggled up the pass and were about the place where Brown's Canyon debouched into the larger pass, when the party entered it, and seeing the girl alone, on their return, rushed forward to secure her. Stella was not the girl to yield tamely to her fate, and raising her little rifle in spite of her wounded arm, she shot the foremost through the shoulder, while Ben pinned a second, who was already faring badly in his grasp. The Indian who was struggling with Stella heard the thunder of coming hoofs, and looking over his shoulder, saw the fierce figure of Buckskin Bill close at hand, waving a hatchet over his head.

With a shriek of dismay the man released his hold and sprung up the rocky side of the canyon, struggling for life. Garrett raised his weapon, but the hard riding had shaken off the cap, and the Indian reached the summit and disappeared.

"Cussed foolishness," roared Bill. "You won't be left alone ag'in, you infant. I ain't goin' to leave you in danger."

"You came in time, dear father," said Stella. "Be thankful for that, and save that poor Indian from Ben."

They forced the hound away and looked at the Blackfoot. He was badly bitten, but might live. The man who had been shot by Stella was howling his death-song at the top of his voice, and evidently expecting instant death. The party came up, looked at the two wounded Indians, and then rode on together.

CHAPTER IX.

THE SECRETS OF THE CAVE.

THE scenery now became grand. Huge rocks were piled high upon either side, mossy and gray, as they had lain for ages. Spire upon spire they rose, the one above the other, and high above their feebler sisters, the snow-capped summits of the Rocky Mountains rose against the summer sky. Their Indian enemies had vanished like a dream, and no savage yell disturbed the wild beauty of the scene.

"You asked to see where I lived," said Stella. "It is nearly time to make a halt, and as I do not wish that all should know the secret of my hiding-place, no one shall go with me except my father and you, Captain Aubrey."

The men looked gloomy at this decision, and she saw it.

"You wish to go, too?" she said. "Well, my house is a large one, and would hold you all, no doubt. Come, then; but some must stay to guard the horses."

"Is there no place to hide them among these rocks?" said Aubrey. "I do not wish to risk a halt, if it will bring any danger to the men."

"Can you find a hiding-place?" said Stella, turning to her father, with a laugh. "Let us try. Every man dismount, lead his horse and follow me."

The path led them up a narrow defile until they were moving along a ledge forty or fifty feet above the path they had just left. Stella stopped, and taking out a small bar which was concealed in a crevice, she struck upon a heavy stone in the face of a perpendicular wall upon the right hand. The blow was no sooner heard than the rock swung inward, showing that it was, in fact, a door of heavy wood, painted so ingeniously as to defy any except the most careful eye from detecting it. The men, some thirty in all, led their horses into a great room, whose roof was hung with stalactites of varied shapes and forms. The room was perhaps two hundred feet in circumference, and rose a hundred feet above them. Stella closed the door and then took candles from a crevice in the wall, lighted a match and set up the tapers where they would give the trappers light enough to attend to their horses. Then, taking a third candle in her hand, she led the way through a long, vaulted passage into another room, which was so grandly beautiful that every one uttered an exclamation of astonishment and delight. The roof above them, under the light of the taper, glowed and sparkled like the "Star Chamber" in "Mammoth Cave." The floor was smooth and even as if carved in marble, and that of remarkable purity. Long lines of columns stretched down both sides of the room and through the center, where the stalactites and stalagmites had met and joined in one. This was Stella Ray's home.

"What do you think of my palace?" she said, laughingly.

"I think that the palace is worthy of the princess," replied the captain, gallantly, "and that is saying a great deal for the palace."

"How we flatter," said Stella. "You should see the princess sitting in state with all her subjects round her. They do not number many—one man and a dog, yet I think few monarchs can count all their subjects faithful."

"You do not mean to leave us out?" said the captain, reproachfully. "You have no subjects more faithful than your new ones."

"Find seats, every one," said Stella, "while I illuminate the palace. You have no idea of the effect of a number of lights in this place. It is almost like fairy-land, and its wonders never cease. When I am tired of sitting alone in this place, I take Ben and explore the cave, which stretches away in various passages for miles. I have heard of wonderful caves in Kentucky. They may be larger than this, but not more beautiful."

"I should think you would be afraid of getting lost in the passages," said Clinton.

"I take care of that. I never move without plenty of tapers, matches and a piece of chalk. As I go on I chalk a broad arrow or hand upon the wall, pointing toward this room. Then it is impossible for me to lose my way."

"But are there not dangerous places in the

cave, where you might fall and never be heard of more?"

"Yes. But I need not fall into them. Come, if you would like to explore this cave, I will lead you."

Only three or four of the trappers, besides Clinton Aubrey and Buckskin Bill, consented to accompany them. But after they had been gone for a moment, Garrett rose and said he would follow them. Taking a taper from a pile upon a little ledge, he lighted it at the fire which one of the men was building, and followed in the track of the exploring party, who were moving on through the long passages, now creeping on their hands and knees, now going forward stooping, until they came out into a second room, larger than the first, and which was fully as wonderful. The limestone had frescoed the ceiling in various fantastic shapes, and on the sides had run down in waving folds, giving it the appearance of tapestry. In one corner, the appearance of a royal couch arose, so perfect in shape that Clinton, looking between the drooping curtains, almost expected to see a sleeping form upon the pure white limestone.

"Is it not beautiful?" said the girl.

"It seems like a dream, or the realization of one of our old Persian or Arabian tales," replied Aubrey. "I never saw its equal in my life. That is the most splendid stone imitation of tapestry I ever heard of."

"I will show you other things as grand. There—what do you think of that?"

She turned and held up her torch, and there, sitting upright against the wall of the room, he saw two giant figures, draped in robes of snow-white beauty. One of the men who had followed them uttered a cry of terror, for he thought he saw spirits.

"The genii of this place," said Stella. "There they sit, as they have sat for ages."

It was nothing, upon closer inspection, but a pair of monstrous stalagmites, rising about eight feet from the floor. Yet the stone had run into such strange shapes as to give them the appearance of a pair of sitting figures. They passed on, leaving these snow-white giants on their thrones, and came into another room, on the threshold of which Stella paused and held up her hand.

"Be careful how you enter here, and be sure of your footing. Father, take hold of my dress. Captain Aubrey, take hold of his hunting-shirt and the others do the same. This is a dangerous place."

She held up her torch and advanced slowly while the rest, clinging to each other, and powerless in the darkness, followed her in single file, each holding the coat of the other and stepping exactly in his footsteps. After a painful silence, she told them there was no longer any fear, and they released each other. Then, holding the flaming torch above her head, she stepped back and showed them that they had crossed a narrow stone path barely four feet wide, on either side of which a dark gulf ran downward ending in utter darkness.

"Ugh!" said Clinton. "It absolutely makes me shiver to look into that hole. How could you cross it so boldly?"

"Use makes us bold," she answered. "I have

crossed it nearly every day of my life, and am accustomed to it. I could cross it blindfold now."

"You are a daring girl. What is this sound of water?"

"A river," replied Stella.

"A river?"

"Yes. In this subterranean home we have a river and a lake. You shall see."

A hundred yards further on they came to the bank of a dark stream perhaps twenty feet wide, flowing dark and silent through the gloom. High above their heads rose the dark arch of the cavern roof, and at their feet the river flowed slowly by. Clinton stood gazing in silent awe upon the strange scene and wondering for how many ages this stream had flowed on, when Stella asked him if he would like a cruise.

"What do you mean?"

"A ride upon this strange river."

"It is Styx. But where is Charon, the ferryman?" said Aubrey.

"I will be Charon for this once. See how my father humors me. He spent whole days in building a canoe and transporting it to this place that I might have a silly wish gratified. Father, stay with the rest upon the bank and let me show Captain Aubrey the mystery of this stream, if you will be so kind."

"I don't like to risk it," said Buckskin Bill.

"You mou't tip over; ye know you mou't, and I don't know whether a man would have the heart to swim in that black water."

"Nonsense," said Stella. "Get in, Captain Aubrey. I will appoint you to carry the torch. I think you had better sit down, for a canoe tips easily. Give me the paddle, father."

She pushed off into the midst of that dark stream, and Clinton Aubrey, though he would have been loth to own it, felt a thrill very nearly akin to terror as the light craft floated on. Yet he did not say a word, but held up the light, while Stella simply held the canoe steady without paddling much, and it floated under a low archway, emerging into a wider space which Stella called a lake. It was a place of unknown depth, dark and gloomy, and here the girl rested on her paddle and let him feel the wild grandeur of the scene. Neither spoke for some moments, and then Clinton broke the silence.

"In the presence of such a scene as this, man feels his own weakness and the greatness of his Creator."

"I am glad you said that," replied Stella. "I like to hear men acknowledge His divinity and power. Let us make the circuit of the lake."

Dipping the paddle slowly in the dark water, the canoe floated round the narrow basin and entered the same outlet by which they had come into the place, and they returned to the spot where the others were standing. Leaving the captain on the opposite bank, she brought over the rest, one at a time, and securing the canoe, took a new taper and led the way again. As they proceeded, Clinton became convinced that the light was growing dim or that they were approaching daylight. All at once they emerged from a dark passage into a circular, bowl-like hollow, scooped out by the hand of nature, in the everlasting hills. The verdure was green upon the sides of this strange place and the bottom was soft and verdant.

"The 'Devil's Bowl,'" said Bill.

In the center of this huge drinking-bowl of the giants, some one had erected a cairn or mound of stones, for what reason they could not divine. All breathed freely now, for it was a relief, after the close air of the cavern, to breathe the free air of heaven. Stella sat down upon the cairn, and the others stood in various positions about it. As they looked about them, a solemn voice broke the stillness:

"Beware! The bloodhounds are on your track. The White Demon gives you warning."

Stella sprang up, and, as she did so, there was a brief struggle upon the verge of the bowl, and then an Indian, with hands outstretched as if to save himself from the terrible fall, came flying down from the terrible height, two hundred feet above.

"Fall back into the shadow," whispered Bill.

"I wonder if that Blackfoot liked the fall?"

"Father, the White Demon is terrible! I fear him dreadfully."

"You needn't. If he had anything ag'in' us, he wouldn't have give us warning, you know. You keep dark a moment and I'll take a peep."

The Indian who had fallen lay where he had dropped, lifeless as clay, with his knife and hatchet clutched in his stiffened hand, and his dead eyes staring and wild. However death had come to him, it had been swift and sure.

Creeping with snake-like caution among the bushes, Buckskin Bill was warned of the presence of the Indians, by the sharp twang of a bowstring, and the silent flight of an arrow, which struck the earth near him.

"Back out, boys," muttered Bill. "A hard time comin'. I guess we'll make these devils sick if they try any games on us."

The arrows now began to drop about him so thickly, that he deemed discretion the better part of valor, and retreated quickly. The Indians were now dancing about on the verge of the bowl, shaking their spears and bows, and evidently anxious to discover whether all the trappers were below or not. Evidently the white men did not intend to let them know this, for not a shot was fired.

"Blackbird is thar," said Bill. "I he'rn that melojious voice of his rising like the voice of an eagle."

"What are they trying to do with that stone?" cried the captain.

Several of the savages were rolling a huge stone to the edge of the bowl, pushing with all their strength.

"The devil," shouted Bill. "Git into that hole, every man, before that stone comes down on yer. It'll clean the place from end to end."

The party darted back into the opening to the cavern, and had hardly done so, when the stone came crashing down, breaking a passage for itself through the trees and bushes which grew in the way, and rolling over the very spot where they had lain concealed a few moments before. The Indians, knowing nothing of the entrance to the cave, supposed the men they sought hidden in the valley, and that the stone they had sent down would start them up. After a pause of some moments a yell of disappointment told that they were baffled.

"I could hit that Indian dancing about like a

jumpin'-jack thar," said one of the men, raising his rifle.

"Don't do it," said Bill. "'Tain't no use to kill 'em off one at a time. Ef we kain't exterminate the hull b'ilin' of 'em to onc't, we kain't make anything by shootin' one or two. Come; let's go back."

"And let them descend?"

"Yes. They don't think of the cave, and ef they find it, what use is that to 'em? They must git torches, and then when they git to the river they must swim it, and we'll try to make that lively work for them."

The party went back over the path they had so lately trod, following the broad arrows chalked upon the wall. In a few moments they had crossed the stream, just as the yells of the Indians announced that they had commenced the descent of the "Devil's Bowl."

CHAPTER X.

BLACKBIRD AND STELLA.

THEY hurried back to the stream, and crossed to the other side.

"This is the place to meet them first," said Stella. "Give me the torch. I will go back and warn the men, for they may hear the cries and attempt to reach us. And if they do they will surely be lost in the interminable passages of this cavern, or plunged into some of the deep spaces which we have passed."

She seized the torch, and hurried away, and they waited in breathless anxiety for her coming. Half an hour passed and she did not appear, and the shouts warned them that the Indians had procured lights, and were already on the way. Prostrate behind giant limestone masses, the men waited for the enemy. Then lights began to show in the long corridor, and they were near at hand.

"Get your revolvers ready," said Clinton. "Let no one else fire, and when they reach the brink of the river, let them have the whole six barrels. Nothing can frighten them as that will. You may fire at random."

The Indians came on, looking more hideous in the ghastly light shed by their torches, and reached the river's brink. The first man, not thinking of such a thing, fell with a loud splash into the cold, dark water, and scrambled out in a rage, calling his companions to a halt. They crowded together upon the bank and held up their torches. Just then the revolvers began to crack, and one after another the bullets flew into their crowded ranks.

It seemed to the astonished Blackfeet that a hundred men faced them, so rapid were the discharges, and they fell back in alarm to the shelter of the rocks, from which they peeped out, and sent arrow after arrow into the darkness, at the place where they thought the foe was lurking. Not a sound was heard, and the arrows rattled harmlessly against the rocks, and fell broken to the stone floor. The chief was in a fury. It was a point of honor with him to capture these men, who had so debased him, and he cared not what sacrifice he made to do the work. Leaving his men to watch the party by the river, he went back to search for another passage, by which he could get into the rear of the men who opposed him. Passages

without number branched off from the main entrance, and in all he saw the broad arrows chalked upon the wall, but they pointed toward the main passage. He was about to give up in despair, when in turning a corner, he came suddenly upon a narrow passage in which the arrow pointed the other way. With the daring peculiar to his nature, he plunged in and pursued his way through a world of beauty for a long distance, pausing now and then to note the arrow on the wall. At length the path seemed to end in a small room hung with tapestry, like the room in which the giant forms were sitting.

He walked round and round the place, seeking for an outlet, until at length he found a set of natural steps, which led upward. He walked up and found the arrow chalked upon the wall pointing into a narrow opening barely large enough to admit the body of a man. Thrusting himself forward, he crept through the narrow passage, still holding the torch, and came out upon the "Giants' Couch," in the presence of those grand old figures. As he did so, the sound of many feet told him that his enemies were near, and hurried back through the narrow passage, and putting his torch in a niche, stole back to see who were coming. Peeping out from the hole in the wall, he saw the whole roof glow and flash as if set with emeralds and diamonds, and the trapper band came on, with Stella at their head, eight or ten of them carrying torches.

"Let the 'Spirit of the Hills' fear me," muttered the chief, for she shall go into my wigwam and cook my venison."

He had his bow with him, and could not resist the temptation to do evil. Raising the bow, he fitted a shaft to the string, and sent the arrow through the shoulder of "Sleepy Joe," who uttered a howl of pain. They heard the twang of the bowstring and paused, looking about them in wonder, but the savage had drawn in his head, and was not to be seen. "Sleepy Joe" danced about in an agony of rage and pain, calling down the ban of wrath upon the head of the Indian who launched that arrow. It had been sent with such force that the head was driven completely through the shoulder, and all he had to do was to break it off and pull out the shaft, raging up and down the vaulted room while he did so. Blackbird kept quiet and they passed on, thinking the shaft had come from the front. The moment they had disappeared, he descended from his perch and followed them through the long rooms, keeping out of the circle of light. They crossed the dangerous bridge in safety, and were greeted when they appeared upon the bank of the river by a cloud of arrows, wounding several of the party slightly.

"Git kiver," shouted Buckskin Bill, "an' then lay low an' keep dark. We ain't goin' to be drew out'n our own house by no low-lived Injun truck that ever lived."

The scattered bowlders about the place furnished noble hiding-places, from which they could use their weapons with deadly effect if the Indians showed themselves upon the bank of the river. But, they had received orders from the chief to keep quiet until he returned, and the party remained *in statu quo*, neither being able to inflict any great damage upon the other,

"Where is Garrett?" demanded Clinton Aubrey.

"Cuss him, he bez j'ined the durned Blackfeet, I reckon," said the guide. "I left him with the rest of the boys."

"Then where is he now?"

"Can't say," replied the Yankee. "He took a torch and said he guessed he'd go after you. That's the last I seen of him."

"Do not blame him too rashly," said Clinton. "Who can tell but the poor fellow has met his death in one of these dreadful chasms which yawn beside the path. I can not think that he is a traitor, or would do us any wrong."

"He don't look like it, I know," said Bill, "but, you kain't 'most always tell what you leastly expect nowadays. He may be a consarned renegade for all we know. Anyhow, he's posted about the Injun kentry."

"So are you."

"I ain't saying he's a traitor. I'd hate to believe that of him myself, 'cause I don't like to see a great strong-bodied white human turn traitor to his fellers. Mebbe he got lost."

"That is easy enough, since Stella had not explained the symbols to him. Taat arrow was well meant. It just skimmed my ear, and took a piece out."

"It must r'ile the cusses awful because they kain't git at us. Stell, what did you do with my lantern?"

"It is in our room."

"I reckon you'd better go and git it, hadn't you?"

Stella took a torch and hurried away. Passing through the long rooms, she at length reached the one where they made their home, and searched for the lantern. It was one which the guide had made in his idle moments, and was a copy of a hideous skeleton head, with grinning mouth and long fangs, a thing which, when lighted in a dark place, showed horribly in the sight of men not acquainted with its nature. He had made a peculiar little lamp which fitted into this strange lantern, and she lighted it, turning the slide so that the grinning teeth and nose were not revealed—nothing but the eyes. With this in her hand she turned back, and hurrying through the rooms, reached the Giants' Couch, when all at once a wild figure, torch in hand, bounded out to meet her. She knew the Indian at a glance, and started back in terror, while he stood fiercely before her, a hatchet in one hand, a torch in the other, looking at her with burning eyes.

"Spirit of the Hills," he said, "where would you go?"

Stella knew the language of the Blackfeet, for in those long nights, when there was nothing else to do, it had been the delight of the guide to give her lessons in the Indian tongue, and she was an apt scholar.

"What is that to the chief?" she answered, promptly. "I go my own way; let him go his."

"The way of the Spirit of the Hills shall be the way of Blackbird henceforth," said the chief. "She must go where he goes, and live in his wigwam, and he will bring meat to the lodge, while another shall keep the lodge-fire bright, and hoe the maize. I have spoken."

"Let me pass," cried Stella.

"The Spirit of the Hills is not a fool, and why should she think the Blackfoot one? No; you can only pass the way Blackbird shall point out, and dwell in his wigwam."

"I must pass," said Stella. "Stand aside, or I call upon the Spirit of the Rocks to come to my aid. Ye have named me Spirit of the Hills, and you do well. Let the chief beware, lest some great evil befall him."

Blackbird looked a little shaken, for he was superstitious, and thought much of the power of the Spirit of the Hills.

"Hush," he said, "Blackbird would not speak evil to the Spirit; but his heart is very tender toward her. Let her think how great a thing it is to come into a lodge where the chief is first councilor of the tribe. Two other wives sit in my wigwam, but you shall be first of all, and they shall be your slaves."

"I will not listen," replied Stella. "I am not of your blood or nation. Let me pass, I say. A great chief will not insult a woman who does not care for him."

"I have sworn," replied the chief, "and the word of a chief is sacred. You shall come into my lodge, and be my wife."

Quick as thought Stella made a blow at the torch, and dashed it from his hand. It fell into a pool of limestone water, and went out with a sharp hiss. She sprung back, and closed the slide of her lantern, so that he could not see her, and then stepped lightly to a niche in the wall, and then remained silent. For a moment the chief was stupefied, and then began to search for her, groping his way stealthily along the wall of the cavern, in the darkness, furious at the thought of losing her after all. Once Stella felt his hand groping at the entrance of the niche in which she was hidden, and placed her hand upon a small dagger which she carried in her belt, and half drew it from its sheath. But he passed by, while his hot breath touched her cheek. It was well for him that he did not touch her, for that moment would have been his last. He passed on, and she breathed more freely, and could hear his steps along the wall upon the opposite side of the cavern. Should she undertake to slip away and cross the bridge? He might hear her, and, directed by her step, seize upon her. She dared not attempt it, and remained quiet.

Again he approached her hiding place, and she thought of a plan. Draw back into the niche, she put out one hand, holding the lantern by its handle, which was at the back of the head, and drew the sides all at once, revealing the fiery face in all its hideous deformity. Blackbird uttered a yell, and recoiled like a man who had seen a spirit, and turning on his heel, plunged into the canopy of the Giant's Couch. He struck his head against a heavy stone, in the darkness, and fell back bruised and bleeding. This was Stella's time. She stole out of her hiding-place, and was passing him, when a portion of her dress touched him. Instantly he seized upon it, but Stella sprung the hideous lantern in his very face. Again he fell back with a howl of fear, and slipping from his grasp, Stella darted across the bridge, leaving him in darkness.

The chief arose, stunned by the blow, and half wild with fear. He was alone in that dismal cave, his torch gone out and no guide out of the labyrinth into which he had penetrated. Yet he had no time to lose, and rising, he groped his way to the couch of the giant, hoping to find his way out in some way. He crept through the opening, and down the flight of stairs, and found himself in utter darkness, and knew that every step he took thenceforth must be in the midst of danger of the greatest kind. He sat down upon the last step and looked about him in dismay. While sitting there, a footstep sounded and a light began to glimmer in the distance. He stepped down from his perch and hid himself behind a broken column, waiting for the newcomer to appear.

The footsteps came on, and he knew by the firm tread that it was a man who approached. A moment more, and he heard the sound of the feet more plainly, the light showed more upon the ceiling of the room, and a tall figure entered the room, a figure which showed ghastly and white under the torch he bore. The chief had seen that gigantic figure before and recognized it now. It was the White Demon!

To fit an arrow to his bow, and send it with all his force at the stout figure of the White Demon was his first thought. The shaft was well aimed, but it fell broken from the person of the strange being, as if it had been discharged against a wall of brass. At the twang of the bowstring, the giant figure turned toward the place from which the sound came, and with a terrified cry, the chief bounded up the stairs and crept into the narrow passage in time to escape a heavy blow from the bludgeon which the White Demon carried in his hand. Baffled by the quick movement of the chief, the strange being darted after him, with an agility which was wonderful in so heavy a figure, and followed so close upon his track that the chief had just gained a footing upon the Giant's Couch when the head of his enemy showed through the opening. The chief struck at it with his hatchet, and the weapon was broken at the handle. Turning toward the opening of the main cavern, Blackbird darted in, followed by the White Demon. There was a wild cry, and the chief fell from the narrow bridge, and was seen no more. The White Demon paused, and held up his torch. Half a dozen rifles were leveled at him, but Buckskin Bill shouted to them to take care.

"The White Demon does no harm to white men," cried the giant. "Fear me not, and know that your worst foe has just gone to his account. Follow me not, nor attempt to stay me, but let me do my work as I will. But, be sure of this, the White Demon will be your friend."

CHAPTER XI.

STELLA'S PERIL.

WHILE they gazed, in mute bewilderment, not unmixed with alarm, the giant figure disappeared, gone they knew not whither. The rude borderers were pale, for there are no people upon earth more open to superstition, so common to untutored minds, than these forest men. They looked at one another in confusion not unmixed with fear, but were recalled to themselves by a renewed attack on the part of

the Indians, who were growing impatient at the continued absence of their chief. The attack brought back their native courage, and the crack of rifles illumined the darkness of the cave. Stella was standing behind a rocky bowlder, just behind the main body of the trappers, encouraging them to fight bravely, when a sudden cry was raised by the Indians in front, and they rose as one man, fleeing in confusion and dismay. What had caused their fright? Nothing more than the fact that Buckskin Bill had set up the lighted lantern upon a rock, with its flaming face turned toward the savage foe. A single glimpse of that distorted and hideous visage was enough for them, and they fled as if the demon was on their track. While Stella was laughing at their confusion, she felt a heavy hand pressed on her mouth, and she was borne back upon the rocky floor of the cavern, helpless in that strong clasp. Her back was toward the chasm, or she would have seen in the dim light of the single torch the maimed and distorted visage of Blackbird rise from the cliff, and creep toward her with a catlike tread.

The fall had not been fatal to him, and he was reserved for another fate. When he fell he had struck upon a shelf ten feet below the verge of the chasm, and seizing upon a projecting stalactite, he had kept himself from falling further, although badly bruised. Crawling up the rough sides of the pit he had reached its top, and seeing Stella near at hand, he had seized upon her, determined to wreak upon her the vengeance he owed to the band of Aubrey. Tearing off the scarf she wore, he so muffled her face in it that in the confusion of the moment, amid the crack of rifles and the yells of wounded men, her feeble cries were not heard. Then, snatching her up in his arms, he darted across the narrow bridge and regained the other passage, dragging her after him. Once there, he put her on her feet, and commanded her to lead the way.

"How can I, in the darkness?" she said, quietly.

"Peace, Spirit of the Hills," replied the chief. "Do not make the chief a fool because white men are so. You know the road through the cavern."

"And if I do, what then?"

"You will show it to the great chief Blackbird, who is to be your husband."

"I would sooner die. Help! help! The chief is carrying me away. Help! help!"

With a savage exclamation, which would have passed for an oath in English, the chief muffled her head in the scarf and darted away down the unknown path, while shouts from the outside apprised him that the trappers had discovered the abduction of the girl, and were already on his track.

Buckskin Bill knew the secrets of the cave as well as Stella, and having lights, would speedily find him out. There was but one course open, and he quickly determined what to do. On the road to the open air was a passage leading into the next room, so narrow that only one could pass through at a time, and here he determined to make a stand. The shouts grew loud behind him, and he knew that the pursuers were already in the passage, and he had not a moment

to lose. Binding Stella's hands and feet tightly with the scarf and a belt, in spite of her struggles, he drew his knife and turned upon his pursuers like a hunted stag.

"Stay, dog of a white man!" he shouted, shaking the glittering weapon in the air. "A child of the Blackfeet warns you."

The exclamation was directed at Buckskin Bill, who, with a revolver in one hand and a torch in the other, had appeared at the other end of the room. He raised his weapon, when Blackbird darted back and shouted to him to stop.

"A single step on this stone floor is a knife in the bosom of the Spirit of the Hills! Turn back then, white man, and return to your place, unless you would kill your child."

He had found a safeguard, then. Every one paused and looked from face to face. Who was there among them who dared advance, when they knew that the chief, reckless of his own life, would slay her rather than suffer her to fall into their hands?

"Give her up," cried Aubrey, "and I will make you rich in the things you most covet. Blankets, rifles, powder and lead shall be yours, if you will let her go."

"Will you give me the little gun that shoots many times?" demanded the chief.

"Yes; both of them; all of them."

"Good. Will you give up your horses and blankets, and promise to come no more into the Blackfoot country?"

"Yes. You shall have every thing in our power to give. Let the girl go free, and for her dear sake I will give up this enterprise, which has been my thought for years."

"The young war-chief would do much for the love of the Spirit of the Hills," said the Indian tauntingly. "Bah! he is a fool, or he would know that revenge is as sweet to the Blackfoot as to the white man, and that he would not give it up for all the blankets and powder in the great villages of the pale-faces. The Spirit is mine; she shall go into my wigwam, cook my venison, and be the wife of a great chief."

"Look hyar, Blackbird," said Bill, "I've hearn tell how't you've been hearn to say thet you'd rather hev me to burn than any man thet treads the plains. All right, here I am. You let my little gal go free, and I'll go with you to the Blackfoot village, and be made a bonfire of, ef you like. Come, you won't have an offer like thet very soon, and I know it. Don't waste time foolin', but get to work at once. Say what you will do, and what you won't do, and be quick about it."

"Bah! Buckskin Bill is a fool, though his head is getting gray. There are white men enough for the Blackfeet to burn, without you. Go; you are children, or you would not try to throw dust in the eyes of a great warrior. Am I a child, or am I Blackbird, the son of Rolling Thunder? I have said it, and the Spirit must go to my wigwam and be my squaw."

At this Stella called out to her father and entreated him, if he loved her, to save her, even by death, from the misery of a life in a Blackfoot lodge. But Buckskin Bill could not do that.

"Blackbird," he said in a stern voice, "how

long do you s'pose I'd let you live ef you carried off my child? I'd hev yer life, ef I hed to foller you into the heart of a village to take it. Now, you'd better take these blankets and powder the young man offers you, and let her go."

"No; have I any fear what a gray-head can do to me? Go back, and let a chief talk to his wife."

They drew off a moment to consult, and the face of the old trapper showed the agony he endured.

"I've bin wrong, boys," he said. "I hadn't no right to bring that sweet young gal into this dangerous place. But it's done, and I'm afeard thar ain't no help fur it, becaus he'll kill her ef we charge on him, jest ez sure ez fate."

"Perhaps we can save her yet," said the young captain, eagerly. "I pledge you the aid of myself and my men to do the work. We will follow him even to his village, and destroy every thing before us, sooner than leave her in his hands."

"Ef I didn't love her so well, I'd take her at her word and charge at him, though he killed her the next minnit. Ain't thar no way to save her from him? Kain't we git a shot at him somehow?"

"I don't see any chance," was the despondent reply.

"Then thar ain't but one way, and thet is, to leave her in his hands and trust to luck to git her away. Or hold on. What do you say ef we go back to the other cave, leave about three men hyar to see thet he don't try to git out this way, make a charge on the red devils at the other end of the cave and drive 'em back long enough to let three or four of us dodge into the small cave."

"The only plan. Who will stay here and see that the chief does not escape this way?" said Aubrey.

Three of the trappers volunteered at once, and leaving them a torch, the remainder hurried back to the cave. The men were now wild for battle, and cheered lustily when it was announced that they were to be led against the enemy, and at once made hasty preparations.

The chief hearing no more of his enemies, yet knew by the light of the torch that all of them had not gone. He remained quiet for some moments and then peeped cautiously out. Yankee Josh saw him and threw a stone at his head with such force and precision that, if he had not dodged with extraordinary rapidity, he would never have troubled them again. As it was, a corner of the stone peeled a portion of the scalp from one side of his head, inflicting a very painful wound, which drew a yell of rage from the chief, and caused him to threaten direful calamities upon the head of the man who had dared to throw the stone at him.

The Yankee only answered by a laugh, and invited him to put out his head again, promising to throw better next time. But Blackbird did not care to test his skill any further, and raising the nearly insensible body of Stella in his arms, he began to grope his way with stealthy steps down the passage, not wishing to let the watching scouts know of his departure. Their orders, however, were not to follow him, even if they had heard his departure. He knew that the

path was full of danger, and that he must proceed slowly. Now and then he would lay his prisoner down upon the rocky floor, and go forward alone to find the best places at which to pass. Stella had by this time recovered from her first alarm, and her wits were at work. When he laid her down, she worked her hands vigorously to endeavor to free herself from her bonds, and succeeded so far that she could slip one hand readily from the scarf with which it was tied.

Stella permitted herself to be carried until he reached another dangerous place, and laid her down. Then she slipped her hand out of the scarf, and got out the small dagger which she carried in her belt and cut the buckskin belt which confined her feet. Then, hearing the chief returning, she put the knife back in her belt and slipped her hand into the scarf again, just as he bent to lift her. She knew that a little further on she must be put down again, and with a patience worthy of the Indian, she waited for the time, keeping her feet in the same position she had held them when bound. Blackbird, in the darkness of the cave, could not see that anything was wrong, and carried her forward until a new obstacle was in his way, when he put her down again and stole forward to search out the path. The moment he did so, she rose quickly, and knowing the place well, ran back several yards, and halted upon the other side of the dangerous place they had just passed, until the chief came groping back in search of her. She heard a low exclamation of surprise as he went over the place where he thought he had left her and could not find her.

"Spirit of the Hills!" he cried, "where are you?"

Stella did not answer him, but had some difficulty repressing an inclination to laugh, for he called her something like a man who is coaxing a canary back to its cage.

"Come, white girl. Do not take the time of the chief. I cannot find you in the darkness, and it is time we were on the way."

Still silent. The chief began to get angry, and ran about in a circle, trying to find her. It had not yet entered his head that she had succeeded entirely in freeing herself from her bonds, but that she had managed to roll herself out of reach, as he had done upon the occasion of his captivity in the camp of the voyagers.

"Child of the bad spirit!" he screamed, "daughter of evil, where are you hidden?"

Still no reply, and the Indian fairly danced with anger, and continued his frantic search up and down the narrow place, putting his hand into crannies which would not have held a mouse, in the vain hope of finding the object of his search, who was seated quietly upon a stone a few paces distant, listening to the frantic appeals of the chief that she would answer him, and cease to take the valuable time of Blackbird, chief of the Blackfeet.

"Woman of the bad heart," he shouted. "I will take your scalp when I find you."

"Thank you," thought Stella. "But you'd better find me first."

She felt so confident of her power to elude him in the darkness, knowing the cave so thoroughly as she did, that she did not make

the slightest effort to escape while he kept on the other side of the dangerous spot. She had determined, too, if he laid hands upon her again, to strike the dagger into his breast before he could shield himself. Stumbling about the narrow place, the chief felt something soft under his feet, and stooping, he picked up the scarf which had bound her hands, and comprehended in a moment that she was entirely free from her bonds. The yell of baffled malice to which he gave vent was too much for Stella's risibles, and she gave utterance to a merry laugh, upon which Blackbird made a rapid rush toward her, grasping at the place where he had heard the voice. He clasped only a cold stone pillar, for Stella had fled from the place.

CHAPTER XII.

A YANKEE TRICK.

THE chief stood a moment listening for her steps to guide him in the pursuit, but the moment she had placed a safe distance between them she stopped again, and stood stock-still, looking about her for some way of escape. Being more accustomed to the dim outlines of the place than the savage, she knew her position exactly while he moved in utter darkness, groping about like a blind man, and cursing her in his heart.

At this moment the sound of a terrific combat and the charging shout of the trappers told that they had begun the assault upon the Indians in the narrow pass. The chief knew that it was vain for him to stay longer to recapture Stella, for his presence was a tower of strength to his men, and without him they could do little.

"Wicked girl," he cried, "for this time you escape me, but not long. Blackbird, son of Rolling Thunder, will never give up the chase until you sit in his lodge. I have spoken."

He turned to go away, and had already taken a few steps in the direction of the battle, which now guided his way, when his body came in contact with that of some other person creeping cautiously up the pass. The next moment they were locked in a savage grapple, but Blackbird, although a man of giant strength, felt like a child in the arms which now infolded him. Yet he put out all his strength, not in the hope of overcoming his adversary, but to wrestle himself out of his grasp and escape. Not a word had been spoken by the assailant, but Blackbird felt arms of steel about him, and hot breath upon his cheek. They fell to the floor together, and a rattling sound came from the man who had assailed the chief. The roar of combat had deepened and lights began to show in the cavern in which the main force was fighting, reflected from the stalactites of their own cavern. Stella could hear a deep, hurried breathing, and then a giant form sprang up alone, and the sound of a quick step was heard darting down the pass.

"Perdition!" cried a hoarse voice. "The villain has escaped me!"

"Who are you?" said Stella, approaching in the darkness.

"Who speaks?" said the same deep voice. "Is it a voice of one long-dead, coming to me in the darkness? Rest, unquiet spirit; rest! I have

avenged you! I have seen your form at night ere now, a shadow in the pale beams of the moon, and that, too, had a voice which whispered to me. 'On,' it said, 'God do so to you, and more also, if you forget one jot or tittle of your sworn oath, until it be fulfilled.'"

"You are mistaken. I am no spirit, but an unfortunate girl who had fallen into the power of this chief."

"Your name?"

"Stella Ray."

"Ha! Then it is the daughter of the trapper who is known as Buckskin Bill. You have heard of me, and know me by the name my Indian foes have given me. I am the White Demon. What Indian is this who escaped me just now?"

"Blackbird."

"He? Did I not see him plunged into the black depths of the chasm yonder, not half an hour ago?"

"Yes. But God had not willed that the wretch should die so, but preserved him for another, perhaps for a worse fate. I cannot tell. But how comes it that you know the secrets of this place, which we thought unknown to any except the friends of Buckskin Bill, and those but few?"

"Child, there are few things in the Indian country which I have not seen. For years I have been a wanderer upon the green earth, going up and down for vengeance, my one solitary thought."

"It is written, 'Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord,'" said Stella, solemnly.

"I learned that when a boy, but I am not willing to wait. Who has said that 'the mills of the gods grind slowly, but they grind very fine.' They grind too slowly for me, and I cannot, I will not wait. The Blackfeet have had reason to mourn the day they crossed my path, and there is not a village through all the broad expanse of country which they call their own, which has not felt the power of my arm. Enough; I hear voices, and they come this way. Doubtless your friends are coming to your aid. I will slip aside, and when they come, say nothing of having seen me if you can help it. But remember, I am your friend."

Stella listened, and heard the sound of voices, among which she recognized that of her father. She stood silent in a niche, and soon a figure flitted by in silence, whose gigantic proportions could only belong to the White Demon, who, for some reason, did not wish to see her friends. A hurried rush of feet followed, and Buckskin Bill, Clinton Aubrey, and two others of the band, rushed into the room.

"I thought that was the chief who rushed past us just now, Bill," said Aubrey. "Look you, old man. If he has killed that sweet girl of yours, there is my hand to follow the vile hound through his country to the very heart of his village and kill him, even at his lodge door."

"Give us your hand. I'm with you, young man," said Bill. "You've got a heart, you hev. I hope no harm has come to my little gal."

"I hope not. Hold up your torch. There has been a struggle here, do you see?"

"Yes," said Bill, "I— Oh, gallory!"

He stopped short, for a pair of rounded arms were about his neck, and a pair of full red lips pressed to his. The old man was nearly frantic with delight, and Yankee Josh, who had come up when the sound of the battle began, danced a frantic hornpipe on the hard floor, accompanied by Irish Pat, while the hound howled an accompaniment. It was a moment of the wildest joy, and then Richard was himself again.

"Back to the cave," cried the captain, "and recall the men. Don't stop to ask questions now. Miss Stella, I hope you will believe me, when I say this is the happiest moment of my life."

"I heard you, sir. What did you mean by offering the chief everything to let me go? You forgot something; you forgot that I am only a houseless, homeless wanderer, but—I am grateful, and so proud to think I have so many friends."

"You git out!" roared Josh. "How ar' ye goin' to help it; how ar' *they* goin' to help it? It's your fault ef we go crazy over you. Hur-ray! I'd like to jump over the moon, I'm so glad."

"You are all very kind," said Stella. "Let us go."

Five minutes after they were in the cave again, and the bugle of Aubrey recalled the men who were yet engaged in the struggle with the Indians, and who now retreated slowly, giving and taking as they went. Aubrey, Buckskin Bill and the others covered their retreat across the stream, and when they were safe upon the other side, they retreated across the dangerous bridge, and left the Indians at liberty to cross if they liked. For the first time they began to find that they were hungry.

"What time is it?" said Bill.

Aubrey took out his watch, and laughed as he did so.

"Upon my word I did not think it possible. What time do you think it is, Bill?"

"'Bout noon, I guess."

"It is nearly seven o'clock at night. We will steal a march upon them yet, but there is no hurry about it. What have you got to eat?"

"There is plenty of jerked venison," said Bill.

"And thar's a lot of pemmican in bags in that room. We ain't got time to cook anything."

"It won't take many to guard the pass now," said Aubrey. "Swinton, Pat, Josh, and Garroway will do. The next post will be the Star Chamber passage. I will set three men there. If you are hard pressed on the first post, my lads, retreat quietly to the second, firing off a pistol to let the boys know you are coming. As soon as some of the boys get supper I will send them to relieve you. Come, Miss Stella, you had better let me help you over these rough stones. Why, your arm is bleeding."

She looked at it in some surprise, and saw that it was bleeding, and she had not noticed it. In her struggle with the savage the wound had reopened, and the blood had stained her fanciful dress. Aubrey grated his teeth and looked wicked.

"Let me dress it again, Miss Stella! It will go hard with Blackbird when I see him again."

He dressed the wound quickly, but neatly,

while Buckskin Bill muttered curses "not loud, but deep" against the Indian who had caused that dear blood to flow. It did not take long to dress the wound, and then they hurried back to the room in which Stella had lived so long. A fire was soon blazing in a sort of natural fireplace against the wall, and the men who were chilled by the damp atmosphere of the cave warmed themselves at the cheerful blaze, while Stella directed them where to find something to eat, and the men, who were very hungry, fell to work upon jerked venison, buffalo pemmican, seasoned with the best sauce in the world, excellent appetites. Aubrey was about to send a relief to the patient guards outside, when the crack of a pistol announced that they were assaulted. The chief, escaping, had joined the force outside, and was not in a mood to wait long. He was frantic with rage at the manner in which he had twice lost possession of Stella, and was determined to have her, cost what it might. His savage followers were not very hot in the service, for they had lost some men, and safe thieving suited them far better than service in which they risked life and limb.

Yankee Josh, as soon as they commenced to cross the stream, fired the pistol as directed, and at once retreated to the next post, and the seven men guarded the narrow entrance to the Star Chamber. The moment the Indians appeared, they received a volley which sent them howling to cover, and there was a pause, in the midst of which the guards were reinforced by the arrival of ten men, headed by Aubrey and Buckskin Bill.

"I'm e'en'most starved to death, capt'in," said Josh, "and if ye could keep 'em off while I git a bite of suthin' ter eat, I'd die happy. S'pose yer could, eh?"

"We'll try," said Aubrey, with a grim smile. "You have obeyed orders well, and now go back to the room, where you will find plenty to eat waiting for you."

"Ain't sorry to hear it," said Josh. "Come on, boys."

Leaving their comrades to attend to the Indians, the guards hurried back to get something to eat. They had been gone some minutes when a happy thought struck Aubrey, as he saw the scattered fragments of rock about the place.

"It seems to me, Bill, that by a little labor we could so block up that passage as to make it impracticable for our friends, the Blackfeet, to pass through. What do you say?"

"Never thought of it, by Jinks," said Bill. "Do it? Of course we kin."

They set to work with a will. First they rolled great blocks of limestone into the passage as far as they could go with safety, and then lifted smaller blocks upon them until they were wedged up to the very roof. Hundreds of these blocks were scattered about in various directions, enough to have built a wall twenty feet high. The Indians were some time finding out what the white men were doing, and when they did understand it, frantic cries announced their appreciation of the ruse which was being practiced, and their desire to stop it if possible.

But by this time the work had progressed so far that the white men could work with perfect safety, and those who understood the Indian

language drove them nearly frantic by their taunts and laughter. Higher and higher the wall of separation was piled, and even after the passage was completely choked up. Then they left the Indians to dance and fume upon the other side of the wall, and came back to the other room, where every one laughed at the queer way they had chosen to guard themselves from attack.

"There is only one thing which puzzles me," said Aubrey. "Either the man who called himself Garrett is a traitor, or he is dead. If he had been lost in the cavern, the sound of the fighting must have brought him to the place where we were."

"I am afraid he is dead," said Stella. "I pity him. What shall we do now?"

"For the present, rest. We need not hurry away. If we only knew the fate of Garrett I should be satisfied. Your beautiful home will be useless to you now, Bill."

"Yes," said Bill, slowly; "but I'm gittin' sick of it, and I'll tell you why. Blood has bin shed here, and it won't be a lucky place for sech ez Stell to live in any more. Said you was going to Oregon, didn't you?"

"Yes; we mean to do our part to build up that great country and develop its resources."

"I will go with you, cap'n," said Bill.

"I shall be glad to have you with me," said the young captain. "Hark to our friends the Blackfeet. I wonder how they like the wall of separation?"

"Not at all," said a quiet voice.

They looked behind them with a start, for the voice was a strange one, and there, standing just in the rear of the party, was the strange being known as the White Demon. Then they saw for the first time what it was which had given him so odd an appearance. He wore a suit of chain armor, of ancient make, which fitted his body everywhere, and which was white as snow. The visor was down, and they could not see his face.

"You know me," he cried, "and I will not lead you astray. Come with me, and I will show you the only way to rid yourselves of the Blackfoot band."

CHAPTER XIII.

DEATH OF THE WHITE DEMON.

BECOMING accustomed to the visitations of this strange being, the trappers had ceased to fear him, although they still looked upon him with wonder. They had seen enough of him to know that he was no friend to the Indians and would do all in his power to harm them. When, therefore, he offered to lead them from the cave and show them a way by which they could cut off the savages from pursuit, they determined to trust him.

"Lead on," said the young captain. "We will follow you."

The giant bowed his head and led the way back to the outer cave in which the horses were corraled. Each man looked to his horse and prepared him for the march, while the White Demon stood looking on, without speaking. When all were ready he approached them.

"You have lost a man who was in your com-

pany this morning, for I saw him when you were in the upper pass. Where is he?"

"You mean a stranger who joined us as we came up from our last camp. Yes, he left us after we entered the cave, and I fear he is dead."

"I fear so too. This is his horse, I believe?"

"Yes."

"Then I had better take it, and if he reappears he may have it again. Is this his rifle?"

"Yes."

"Then I am armed with a dead man's weapons," said the stranger in a mournful voice. "Yes, it is better for me to be so armed, for I am as much dead to the world as if I were rotting in my coffin, and I have to thank the Blackfeet for it. Come."

He led the gray horse, an animal of wonderful length of limb, out of the cave, and in a moment the whole band were in the saddle and moving in silence up a narrow path which led up the mountain pass. Imitating the example of the giant, they let the horses feel their way in the gathering darkness, trusting to their instinct to make their footing sure. For half an hour the party continued the ascent, when the moon rose slowly in the clear sky and they could make their way more readily. All at once their ears were greeted by the sound of many horses stamping, neighing, and biting at each other as mustangs will when in a corral, and they knew that they must be approaching the place in which the Indians had left their horses. The White Demon paused, lifted his hand for silence, and then beckoned the captain to be close to him.

"Pick out ten men besides yourself for a dash. It must be quickly done or not at all. If we can get possession of these horses and take them with us, the Indians must return to their village for more, and it will go hard if you cannot make you camp in the country of the Crows before they can do that. The Crows will do you no harm, for James Beckworth is a chief among them, and if he has his vices, at least he will not see harm done to white men by his tribe."

"Your plan is good," said the captain, in the same cautious whisper. "I will act upon it."

Pointing out the men he wished to use, they rode out from the rest, preparing their weapons as they did so. The men chosen were all hardy trappers, trained in the devices of the savages. They were made to understand what was required of them without useless talk, and when all was ready, they dismounted, and stole forward on foot. Blackbird had left a horse-guard of ten picked warriors, men who understood their business, but who did not dream of an assault from the direction in which it was coming. Crawling like snakes along the ground, the party reached a place from which they could look into the corral. It was an opening surrounding the Devil's Bowl, perhaps two or three acres in extent, covered with a growth of short green grass, upon which the horses were feeding, secured by the long rawhide lariats which left them considerable freedom of action. The trampling of so many feet and the vicious squealing of some of the ill-tempered brutes aided the assailants in approaching the camp unperceived. A hundred horses guarded by ten

men, who were just now intently engaged in listening to the sounds coming up from beneath, which told that their comrades had given up the futile attempt to break through the barrier which had been set up against them.

The White Demon gave the signal by lifting his hand, and the next moment the horse-guard was appalled by the appearance of twelve strong men armed to the teeth, plunging down upon them. Foremost among these, advancing with mighty strides, they saw the man or demon they most dreaded, the White Demon, whirling over his head a rifle, which seemed a feather in his grasp. The sight was too much for their nerves to bear, and with yells of fear they launched themselves at the sides of the Devil's Bowl, and heedless of the danger to life and limb, plunged recklessly downward. Only one man, a stout warrior who wore a necklace of bears' claws, which no one has a right to wear unless he has slain the "grizzly" in fair fight, stopped a moment on the brink, poising his heavy spear, sharpened like a razor. The White Demon rushed at him, and the Indian struck him full in the breast, and they saw blood upon the bosom of the white armor. The giant uttered an unearthly cry, and snapping off the spear like a reed, he struck the Indian in the face with his clinched hand, and hurled him down the side of the "Devil's Bowl." They saw his body describe a parabolic curve in the air, and then hover for a moment and strike the earth at the bottom. The corral was now in the wildest confusion, the cries of the Indians below mingling with the neighing of the mustangs, and the shouts of the assailing party. Answering the bugle of Aubrey, the white band rushed forward, and helped to secure the trampling beasts. Before the band of Blackbird could emerge from the intricate windings of the cavern in which they were entangled, every mustang was secured in such a way that he could not escape, and driven down the mountain path a little way, two abreast, for not more than that number could pass at once. At the same time the band of Blackbird began to struggle out of the depths of the cavern, and were greeted by a rattling volley which drove them to seek shelter in the cave again. Hemmed into the narrow circumference of the bowl, whose sides could only be ascended upon that portion upon which the trappers stood guard, the Indians were entirely at a disadvantage, and they saw it. Skulking into the cave, they sat down, while Blackbird shouted to Aubrey for permission to come out and treat.

"You may come," said Aubrey, "and we promise that you shall not be harmed."

Blackbird came climbing up the rugged sides of the bowl, his savage face showing the agony he suffered at being outwitted.

"The devil who has aided you so long has left you, it seems," said Aubrey. "What have you got to say?"

"Our white brothers must not be too hard upon their brothers the Blackfeet," was the reply. "Blackbird is sorry he has done wrong to his brothers, but he was deceived. He thought they were children, but he know now that they are brave men, as brave even as the Blackfeet. We have decided to let our brothers go in peace

if they will give us the rifles, the powder and balls, and the blankets they promised."

"I have a mind to tie you up and give you a sound drubbing which will teach you to be less impudent," said Aubrey, exasperated at the demand. "You are in our power, not we in yours. It would serve you right if we swept you from the face of the earth. These are our terms. You shall order ten of your braves to bring up all the bows, arrows, hatchets and spears in your band, and we will destroy them before you. Being weaponless, it will be out of your power to do us an injury."

"The white man does not mean that?" said the Blackfoot, in dismay.

"We mean that, and nothing else," said the other. "Get about it at once."

The Indian went to the verge of the bowl, and called out the order in the Indian tongue, merely making the mistake of ordering *all* his men to come up with the arms.

"That won't do," said Bill. "The cap'n said ten men; if any more offer to come out they are dead men."

With a look of baffled rage and disappointment, the chief changed his order, and ten disconsolate braves appeared, each bearing in his arms a bundle of weapons, which Buckskin Bill and some of the rest sorted out and counted. After about half had been brought up the savages signified that they had brought all.

"It won't do," repeated Buckskin Bill. "That's plenty more whar these come from. Bring 'em up."

Cursing the cunning of the old guide, the Indians again set to work, until all the weapons were lying upon the rocks.

"You may go back to your cave," said Aubrey, "and when you hear the bugle, you can come up. If you come before, woe upon your heads."

Blackbird paused a moment upon the brink, and cast a look of malignant hate at the party.

"You have conquered," he said. "But remember this: Blackbird, son of Rolling Thunder, will never forget nor forgive, and he is almost happy, because he sees blood upon the breast of the White Demon."

With these words he disappeared, and they saw him no more. All, in the hurry of the moment, had forgotten the man who had aided them in their extremity, and turning to look at him when the chief spoke, Aubrey saw him leaning against a tree, his visor up, and a face of ashy paleness. Aubrey and Buckskin Bill ran to aid him, calling to the rest to watch the Blackfeet, but as they approached him his giant form trembled and sunk to the earth like a fallen tower.

"Undo the armor," he whispered. "I am going home."

They hastily unstrapped the mail, took off the helmet, and bared his noble face and breast, when all saw to their utter surprise that *Garrett* was the White Demon. The spear of the savage had penetrated a weak spot in the mail, and the broken head still protruded from his breast. Aubrey laid his hand upon it, and would have drawn it out, but the White Demon stopped him.

"A moment," he said. "I have not long to stay, and when you draw the spear from my

bosom I am gone. Call the trapper, Buckskin Bill. I wish to speak to him."

"Here I am," said Bill. "What is it?"

"Who is the girl you call your daughter; is she really your child?"

"No. I found her on the prairie, sixteen years ago," replied Bill.

"Tell me about it, and be quick, for I am going fast."

Buckskin Bill hastily recapitulated the story he had told in the trappers' camp while the White Demon lay silent.

"Enough," he said. "I am satisfied. Child, come to me and hear what I have to say. I am that unfortunate man, whose wife was slain upon the prairie while upon a hunt, during the passage of the plains to the fort in the Crow country."

"Since that time I have ranged the hills, thinking of nothing, caring for nothing, but to take vengeance upon her slayers. I have done my work, and am satisfied. Ah!"

Stella threw herself, weeping, by the dying form of her father, with his hand clasped in hers.

"Your name is Stella Ray, indeed. How did you find that, Buckskin Bill?"

"It was on a letter I picked up by the wagon next day, and a man read it to me. That's how I knew to name her Stella."

"You have done nobly by my child. These hills have been my home as well as yours; I knew you lived in the cave, and I made my home in this end. Often I have been forced to hide when you passed through. The armor I wore was an heirloom of the family, and I put it on that day, when I left camp, in sport, and I have found it of inestimable value since. It failed me at last, but not until I had done my work. Young man, I have seen in your eyes that you love my daughter. Is it not so?"

"I hope to win her love some day," said Aubrey, in a low voice.

"I believe you will be true to her, and I think she loves you. The Indians whom you have found dead upon the trail without a mark of violence, perished by my hand, no matter how. Never separate Stella from the true man who has been a faithful father to her all these years. Take my armor, after I am gone, and preserve it as a memento of the man who loved her mother well. Good-by, all; I go to my wife."

In a moment the White Demon was no more. They found upon his body a manuscript which told his name and the story of his life. Phillip Ray was a scion of a family in England, which dated its history before the conquest. Aubrey lifted the half-fainting girl, while some of the men covered the body with a blanket and lifted it to a horse. They rode all night, and at early morning made him a grave upon a sunny slope, and that poor tired heart was at rest.

As the rest of the band rode on, Clinton and Stella paused a moment beside the grave.

"You heard what he said, Stella," said the young man, gravely. "My fate is in your hands. Shall I be your guard through life?"

She gave him both hands quickly, and he pressed his lips to them; then they rode on after the others, toward the distant West, to make the name of Aubrey a household word in their beautiful Western home.

THE END.

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